

Religious Schools in London: School Admissions, Religious Composition and Selectivity?

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Introduction

'The Church's commitment to the provision of education extends over many centuries. It was most powerfully evident in its drive for the mass provision of Christian education for the poor in the early and middle years of the nineteenth century' (Church Schools Review Group, 2001, p. 6).

The Catholic Bishops: *'identify five key areas that distinguish Catholic schools, including the search for excellence and education for all, with a particular duty to care for the poor and disadvantaged. This is reflected in the Bishops' support for comprehensive status for Diocesan schools'* (Catholic Education Service, 2003, p. 7).

In England, since 1997, Labour administrations have been active in their support of religious schools (Labour Party, 1997, 2001). The government aims to increase their number (DfES, 2005) and a significant proportion of new and planned academies – which are officially classified as independent, but which receive the bulk of their capital and revenue funding from the government – have religious sponsors. According to *The Independent* (2006) 42 of the first 100 academies had Christian sponsors.

At present, around 36% of primary schools and 17% of secondary schools in England have a religious character. Virtually all (99% of primary and 98% of secondary schools) are Christian (DfES, 2006).¹ Parents who wish their child to be educated at a state-maintained religious school are able to express a preference for religious schooling, as long as there is an accessible religious school.

Concerns about religious schools have been expressed: these relate on the one hand to religious segregation, and on the other to school selectivity. The concerns about religious segregation arise because almost all secondary schools with a religious character have admissions criteria specifying that the pupil should be of the faith or denomination of the school in question. This religious segregation will necessarily lead to minimal contact between children of certain ethnic backgrounds; some argue this will promote both racial and religious intolerance. It is for this reason that a

¹ In January 2006, there were 28 Jewish primary and eight secondary schools; four Muslim primary and two secondary schools; one Sikh primary and one secondary school; and one primary and one secondary school classified as being 'other' (DfES, 2006).

series of opinion polls have reported large majorities of the public are opposed to government-funded religious schools, and indeed an expansion in their numbers (Guardian, 2005; Christian Today, 2006; Populus, 2006).²

Agreement has been reached that religious schools should teach about other religions (Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA), 2004). Further, during the passage of the Education and Inspections Bill 2006, voluntary agreements were made between the government and the Church of England that new schools would make 25% of places available without a test of faith (Church of England Board of Education, 2006) and a similar agreement made ‘to ensure that up to 25% of places in new Catholic schools for pupils from other or no faith would be additional to the demand for faith places’ (Catholic Education Service, 2006). It was also agreed, and is part of the Education and Inspections Act 2006, that the governing bodies of all schools, including those with a religious character, have a duty to promote community cohesion.

The concerns about school selectivity arise because admissions criteria to religious schools normally require not only the demonstration of religiosity, but are also more likely than those of community or voluntary-controlled schools (whose admissions are controlled by the local authority) to include a wide range of selective and potentially selective admissions criteria and practices including the use of interviews and pre-admission meetings (West et al., 2004; West et al., 2006).³ Parents may also be required to provide supplementary information, unrelated to the school’s admissions criteria (e.g., their occupation; whether the family lives in a hostel or bed and

² 64% chose ‘Schools should be for everyone regardless of religion and the government should not be funding faith schools of any kind’ in Guardian/ICM poll of August 2005. 62% agreed ‘Faith schools are divisive because they prevent children from different religious backgrounds from getting to know and understand each other’ in Populus poll of October 2006. 44% of Londoners said they believed all faith schools should be banned in a YouGov/Evening Standard survey of August 2006.

³ Selective and potentially criteria included: selecting a proportion of pupils on the basis of ability/aptitude; interviews with pupils/parents; priority to the child of an employee/governor/former student; pupil with a family connection with the school; pastoral benefit to the pupil of attending the school; the pupil’s primary school report/recommendation of the primary school headteacher; the academic record of the pupil’s sibling(s); compassionate/exceptional factors; organisations associated with school; community involvement by parents/children.

breakfast accommodation; whether parents have refugee status (Pennell et al., 2006)).⁴

This paper focuses on these two issues, namely school segregation and school selectivity. The first question it seeks to address is to what extent are religious schools segregating pupils by religiosity, and associated with this, ethnicity; the second question relates to the extent to which religious schools are selective in terms of the social composition of schools and (related to this) academic ability.

These questions are answered via an examination of the composition of London secondary schools with a religious character. London was chosen as the location for this research given its religiously diverse population and the high proportion of publicly-funded religious schools in the capital (see West and Hind, 2006). The first section provides a brief historical context and this is followed by an outline of the current levels of religious adherence in England. The third section focuses on the data and methods used. The fourth presents the main analyses: in the first instance, we briefly outline the religious composition of secondary schools with a religious character, before looking in more detail at the composition of schools in terms of their known free school meals eligibility (an indicator of poverty), ethnicity and prior attainment (in terms of Key Stage 2 results). The final section discusses the findings and their implications for policy.

The paper argues that secondary schools in London with a religious character tend to cater predominantly for pupils from particular religions and/or denominations and ethnic groups. In addition, they also cater, in the main, for pupils who are from more affluent backgrounds and with higher levels of prior attainment than pupils in non-religious schools.

Historical context

Historically, religious bodies have played an important role in the provision of education across much of Europe (Ramirez and Boli, 1987). In England, the churches and in particular the Church of England, have played a highly significant and

⁴ This research was carried out prior to the implementation of the School Admissions Code (DfES, 2007). The earlier codes of practice provided non-statutory guidance to which admission authorities were required to 'have regard' (DfEE, 1999; DfES, 2003).

enduring role. ‘The Church of England was to remain hegemonic well beyond the medieval era, reflecting its constitutionally prescribed role as the state religion’ (Kendall and Knapp, 1996, p. 166).

The prestigious boys’ public schools were established under the auspices of the church, Winchester in the 14th Century, Eton in the 15th Century and Westminster, Rugby and Harrow in the 16th Century. Winchester was set up for poor scholars but a certain proportion of the boys were to be the sons of the ‘noble and powerful’ (Trevelyan, 1944, p. 52). By the end of the 16th century, the well-known public schools were educating, in the main, those who were relatively wealthy and two centuries later:

an élite group of nine Anglican foundations (including Eton and Winchester) now stood out as providers of schooling for the very highest echelons of society....[T]heir constitutional commitments to educate the local poor were widely ignored, and most had developed into boarding schools attended predominantly by the wealthy from all over the country (Kendall and Knapp, 1996, p. 167).

Murphy (1971) writing in relation to the 1800s commented that ‘there was still very general agreement that the education of the poor should be provided by the churches’ (p. 4). In the late 19th century the Catholic church set up its own network of schools; at this time the Anglican and Catholic churches dominated the voluntary provision. Also during the 19th century, state involvement in the education system commenced. The direct intervention by the government via the 1870 Education Act was a response to the fact that in parts of the country large numbers of working class children were not being provided for by the religious schools and publicly-funded schools were set up to fill the gap. Subsequent legislation consolidated the role of the state in the provision of education (see Murphy, 1971). However, it is significant that the number of Catholic schools increased between 1900 and 1914: this was ‘a direct response from the church authorities to the continued expansion of the Catholic working class population, contrasting sharply with the experience of the Protestant denominations.’ (Kendall and Knapp, 1996, p. 177).

It was not until the 1944 Education Act that a system of universal, free and compulsory schooling was set up for children from the age of 5 to 15.⁵ Schooling was provided by local authority run schools and church schools. Church schools could either have increased state funding and control by local education authorities as ‘voluntary-controlled schools’ or reduced state support and more independence (including control over student admissions) as ‘voluntary-aided’ schools (Church Schools Review Group, 2001). The 1944 Act also permitted an element of parental choice, in that children were to be educated, within certain constraints, in accordance with their parents’ wishes, so allowing for example, religious schooling.⁶

Few religious schools exist that are not Christian. However, there are a small number of long-established Jewish schools and, since Labour was elected in 1997, a small number of schools catering for other religious groups have been set up. Of the non-Christian schools with a religious character in England, 36 are Jewish, six Muslim, two Sikh and two defined as ‘other’ religion (DfES, 2006).

Religion in England

The role of the churches within the publicly-funded school sector in England is no longer as great as it was in the late 1800s. Nor does religion have the high profile that it once had within the country. In the 2001 Census, a question about religion was asked, namely: ‘What is your religion?’. The options given were none; Christian; Buddhist; Hindu; Jewish; Muslim; Sikh; any other religion. Altogether, 71% of the population reported being Christian, with 15% reporting no religion, 8% not stating a religion, 3% reporting that they were Muslim, 1% each Hindu, Jewish and Sikh.

However, these findings need to be treated with caution as the British Social Attitudes Survey (BSAS) (2000), asking a somewhat different question (and for Great Britain as opposed to England): ‘Do you regard yourself as belonging to any particular

⁵ There was a recommendation that the school leaving age should be raised to 16 when practicable; this happened in 1972.

⁶ According to section 76 of the 1944 Education Act, local education authorities were to have regard to ‘the general principle that, so far as is compatible with the provision of efficient instruction and training and the avoidance of unreasonable public expenditure, pupils are to be educated in accordance with the wishes of their parents’.

religion’, found that 55% reported being Christian, 5% other religions, 1% did not answer and 40% reported none. Thus, the percentage reporting religions other than Christianity are broadly in line, but those reporting being Christian were far lower in the BSAS (2000).

Turning specifically to London, there is far more religious diversity than in the rest of England. According to the 2001 Census, 58% of the population reported being Christian, 16% no religion, 9% not stating a religion, 8% reporting that they were Muslim, 4% Hindu, 2% Jewish 1% Buddhist and 1% Sikh and 1% other.

Although the 2001 Census suggests that a smaller proportion of those living in London are Christian than in England as a whole, the English Church Census, which provides a snap shot of church attendance on one Sunday in 2005, suggests the opposite. Overall, a greater proportion of Londoners attended church (8%) compared with the country as a whole (6%). The proportions of Roman Catholic and Pentecostal denominations were particularly large; the latter has a very significant black ethnic representation (Brierley, 2006). This tension between individuals describing themselves as Christian yet not attending church, has lead Grace Davie (1994) to characterise Britain’s current religious condition as ‘believing without belonging’.

Table 1: Percentage of population attending church on Sunday 8 May 2005

	Anglican	Roman Catholic	Baptist	Pentecostal	Other Christian	Total
London	1.2%	2.6%	0.6%	2.0%	1.9%	8.3%
England	1.7%	1.8%	0.5%	0.6%	1.7%	6.3%

Source: 2005 English Church Census (see Brierley, 2006)

Whilst overall church attendance is comparatively low in England, attendance at religious schools is significantly higher. Thus, in England as a whole, although only 6.3% of the population attended church one Sunday in May 2005, over twice as many pupils (14.8%)⁷ attended a religious secondary school in 2005.⁸ In London, 8.3% of

⁷ Authors’ calculations from DfES data.

⁸ In England, 4.5% of pupils were in Church of England secondary schools in 2005; 1.7% of the population attended an Anglican church one Sunday in May 2005; 9.5% of pupils were in Roman Catholic secondary schools and 1.8% attended a Roman Catholic church.

the population attended church on the Sunday in question and 20% of pupils attended a religious secondary school in 2005.⁹

Data and Methods

The research reported here derives from two main sources. In the first section, we report on a survey, carried out in June 2006, of London voluntary-aided secondary schools and academies classified by the Department of Education and Skills (DfES) as having a religious character (for details see Pennell et al., 2007). Schools were asked to provide the number of pupils currently on roll of different religions or no religion. Of the 47 comprehensive secondary schools and academies with a religious character that provided information, 32 were Roman Catholic (out of 67 in London (see Table 2)), ten Church of England (out of 25), three Jewish (out of three) and two were of other Christian denominations (out of three). Grammar schools were excluded from the analysis (as they are for the main analyses reported in the second section – see below).

In the second section, we report on the main empirical analysis, which compares the characteristics of pupils at religious and non-religious schools in London, in relation to pupils who live in the neighbourhoods adjoining these schools. We draw data from the National Pupil Database (NPD) for 2005, an annual administrative record of all pupils in state maintained schools. Specifically, we study the cohort of year 11 (aged 15/16) pupils who were in London schools in 2005.

We use indicators of social background, ethnicity and attainment on entry to secondary school in our analysis. The main drawback of using NPD is that it does not provide a good indicator of the socio-economic status of the child, so this study relies

⁹ In London, 5.4% of pupils were in Church of England secondary schools in 2005 and 1.2% of the population attended an Anglican church on the Sunday in question; 14.1% of pupils were in Roman Catholic secondary schools and 2.6% of the population attended a Roman Catholic church.

on eligibility for free-school meals (FSM) as an indicator of low income.¹⁰ The pupil prior attainment (known as ‘ability’ in this study) variable is constructed from the average Key Stage 2 (KS2) mark the child achieved in maths, English and science tests at the end of primary school. Documentation of the construction of this continuous variable (where marks are re-calibrated as fractional equivalents of levels) can be found in Levačić *et al* (2005). For ease of exposition, we use binary indicators for whether a pupil is in the top quartile by ability (‘top ability’) and lowest quartile by ability (‘low ability’). We also draw indicators of ethnic background of the pupil from NPD. Table 2 shows a summary of these main pupil characteristics for London schools.

Table 2: Pupil characteristics of London schools in analysis

	London non-grammar schools	All schools in England
FSM	23.59%	13.29%
Top 25% ability	21.40%	25.00%
Low 25% ability	28.26%	25.00%
Asian Indian	7.02%	2.27%
Asian Pakistani	3.39%	2.27%
Asian Bangladeshi	3.90%	0.90%
Black African	9.45%	1.54%
Black Caribbean	7.82%	1.48%
White British	44.13%	81.52%
Number of pupils	68,155	573,227
Number of schools	386	3,108

Note: we exclude special schools, hospitals and detention centres etc; we assign pupils to the top 25% and lowest 25% by KS2 score nationally, so that more than 25% of pupils in London non-grammars are *low ability* pupils.

Pupil and school postcodes are used to place each pupil’s school and home address on an OS grid location to within 1 metre of the mean postcode position and within 100 metres of the pupil’s home address. For an exploration of the accuracy of these grid references, see Harland and Stillwell (2007).

The National Pupil Database is matched to school-level administrative data from Edubase, which is an annual census of schools, and the Register of Educational Establishments. This provides school postcodes, religious denomination, and other school type characteristics. For the purposes of this analysis, we drop the small number of London grammar schools that accept pupils on the basis of an entrance test

¹⁰ Drawbacks of the FSM measure are discussed in Croxford (2000) and Shuttleworth (1995).

(the 11-plus). This is because the ability composition of these schools is obviously and necessarily, to a considerable extent, independent of their location. This leaves us with 386 secondary schools, of which four are City Technology Colleges and seven are Academies. The religious denomination of these schools is shown in Table 3.

Table 3: Religious denomination of London schools in analysis

Number of London schools	
No denomination	287
Church of England	25
Roman Catholic	67
Christian	2
Jewish	3
Seventh Day Adventist	1
Sikh	1
Total	386

We analyse the characteristics of pupils living in a school’s neighbourhood by asking ‘What would the intake characteristics of the school be if the school gave priority to those pupils who lived closest to the school?’. So if, for example, a school had 134 pupils in one cohort, we use the grid coordinates provided by the postcode of the school and all pupils in NPD (including those not in London schools) to find the 134 pupils who live closest to that school according to their NPD postcode. We take account of single sex status of a school where necessary (by excluding females from the analysis for boys’ schools, and vice versa). We call the overall characteristics of these pupils the ‘*proximity characteristics*’ of the school.

As part of our analysis of school intakes we use a ratio of the current characteristics of the school over the proximity characteristics of the school. For example, we can use this to compare the number of FSM pupils who go to the school, relative to the number who would go if the school’s intake reflected the social characteristics of those living closest to the school:

$$\text{Proximity Ratio (FSM)} = \frac{\%FSM_{\text{current}}}{\%FSM_{\text{proximity}}}$$

Analysis

Part 1 Survey of secondary schools with a religious character

There are clear differences between the religious composition of schools that are Church of England, Roman Catholic, Jewish and other Christian denominations. As shown in Table 4, in Church of England schools around seven out of ten pupils (73%)

are reported by secondary schools to be Christian and just under one in ten are reported to be Muslim.

Table 4: Religious composition of Church of England comprehensive secondary schools in London (N=10)

Religion	Mean percentage of pupils (a)
Christian	73.0
Hindu	1.3
Jewish	0.4
Muslim	8.6
Sikh	0.7
Other	3.4
No faith	5.8
No information	6.9

(a) Percentage does not add up to 100 because of rounding

As shown in Table 5, in Roman Catholic schools, over nine out of ten pupils (96%) are reported to be Christian. Very small percentages of pupils are of other religions or no faith.

Table 5: Religious composition of Roman Catholic comprehensive secondary schools in London (N=32)

Religion	Mean percentage of pupils (a)
Christian	95.8
Hindu	0.5
Jewish	0.0
Muslim	1.3
Sikh	0.1
Other	0.7
No faith	0.7
No information	0.8

(a) Percentage does not add up to 100 because of rounding

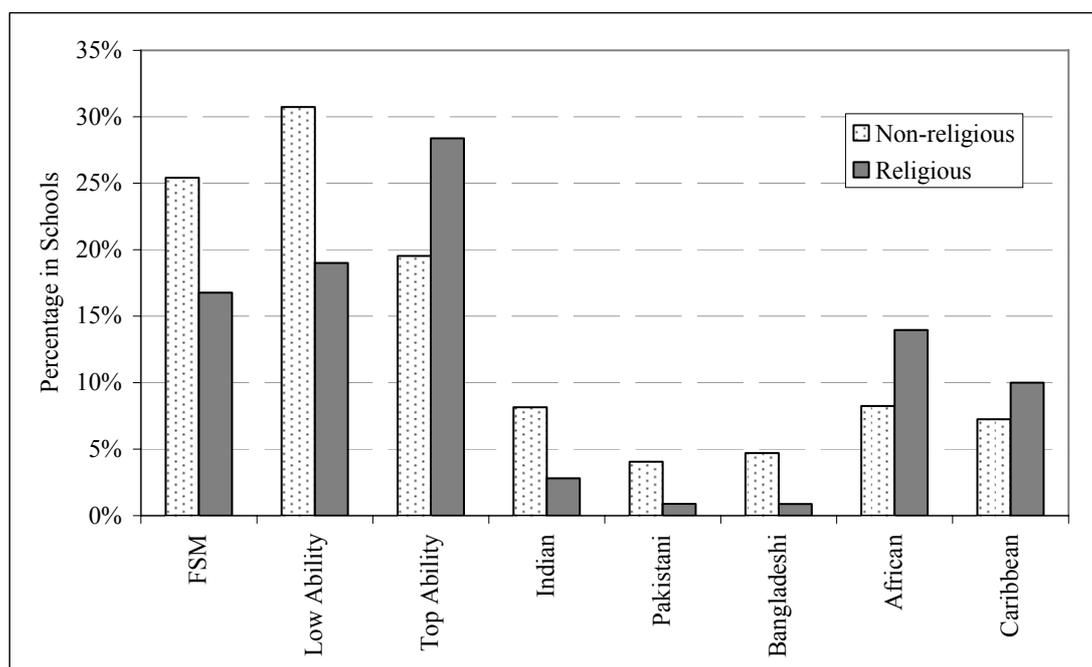
In the three Jewish schools, all pupils are reported to be Jewish. In the two schools of other Christian denominations, an average of 83% of pupils are reported to be Christian.

Part 2 Intakes of Religious and Non-religious London Schools

London schools with a religious denomination are quite different from non-religious schools, as shown in Figure 1. Their pupils tend to come from more affluent families, with just 17% eligible for FSM, compared to 25% in non-religious schools. They educate a smaller proportion of the lowest ability pupils (19% versus 31%) and a greater proportion of highest scoring pupils in KS2 (28% versus 25%).

Pupils from all South Asian minority groups are under-represented, with just 1% of Pakistani and Bangladeshi pupils educated in religious schools. Consistent with data from the 2005 English Church Census, pupils from Black African and Caribbean ethnic groups are over-represented relative to all other groups. However, within the group of Black ethnicity pupils, those who do attend religious schools are less likely to be eligible for FSM (24% versus 37% in non-religious schools), less likely to be low attaining pupils at KS2 (27% versus 42%) and more likely to be high ability pupils (17% versus 12%).

Figure 1: Intake composition of religious and non-religious secondary schools in London



These average intake composition statistics for schools in Figure 1 hide considerable variation within the groups of religious and non-religious schools. Figure 2 shows the distribution of FSM proportions in religious and non-religious schools. Three-quarters of religious schools have FSM levels below the London average, with many having almost no FSM pupils. However, 3 religious schools have FSM levels over 50%.

Figure 2: FSM proportions in religious and non-religious secondary schools

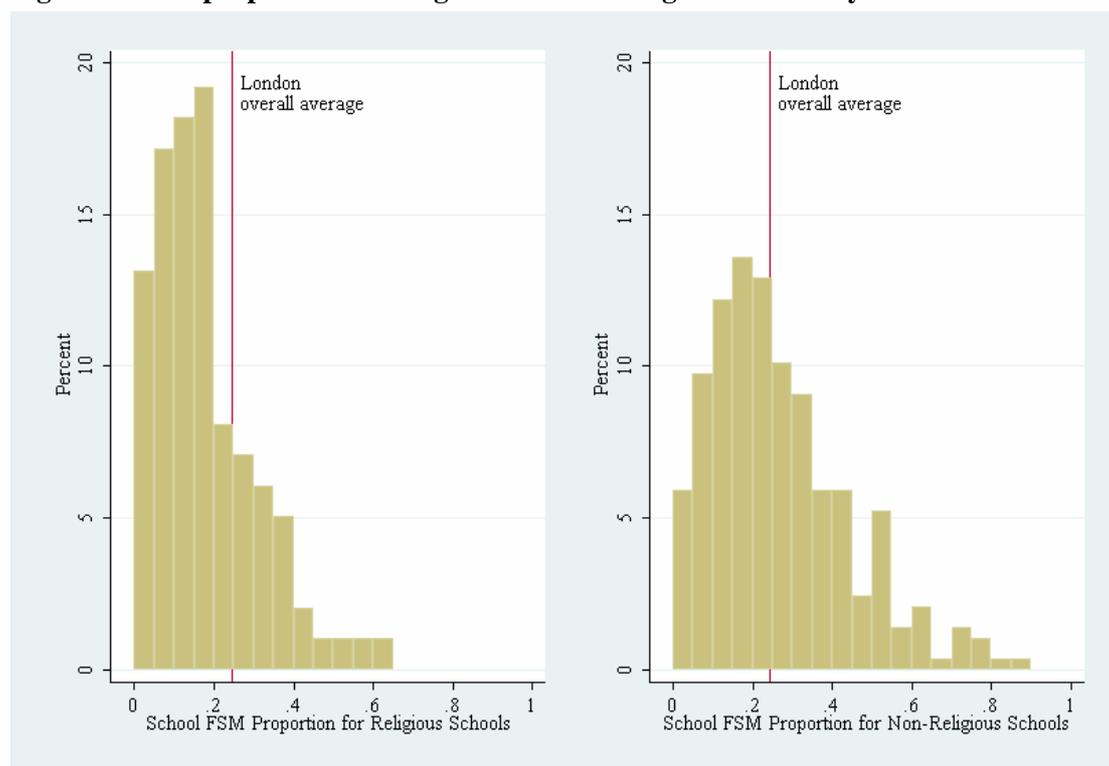
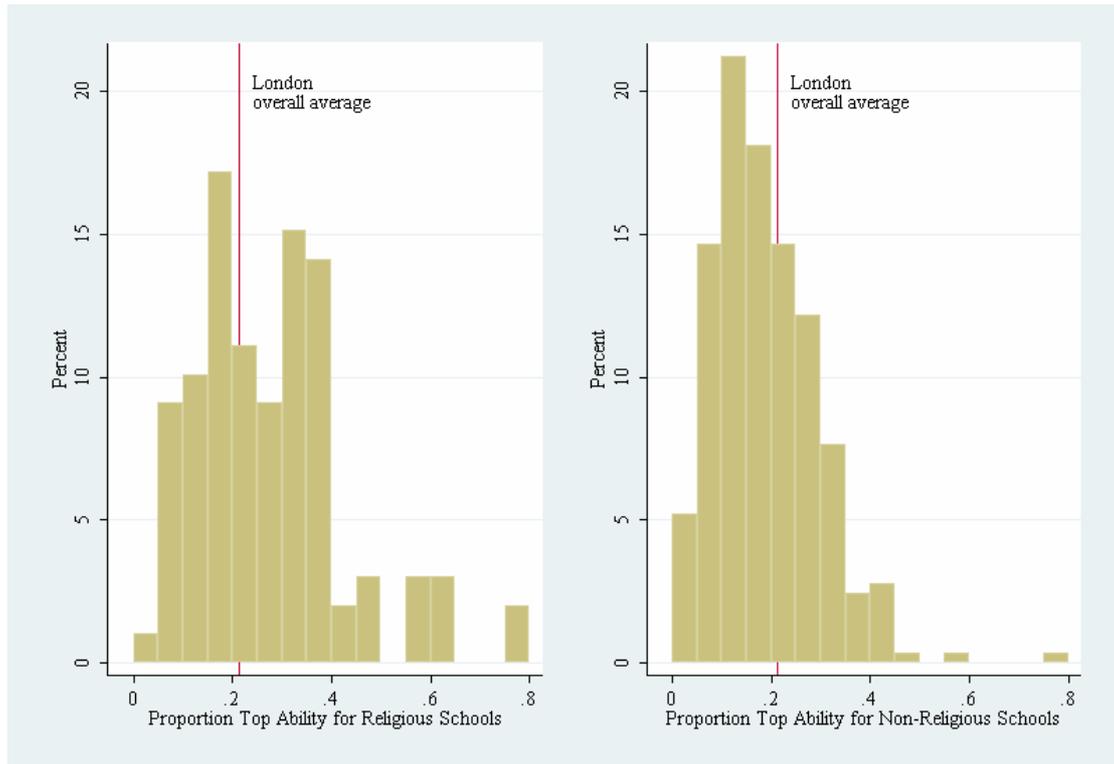


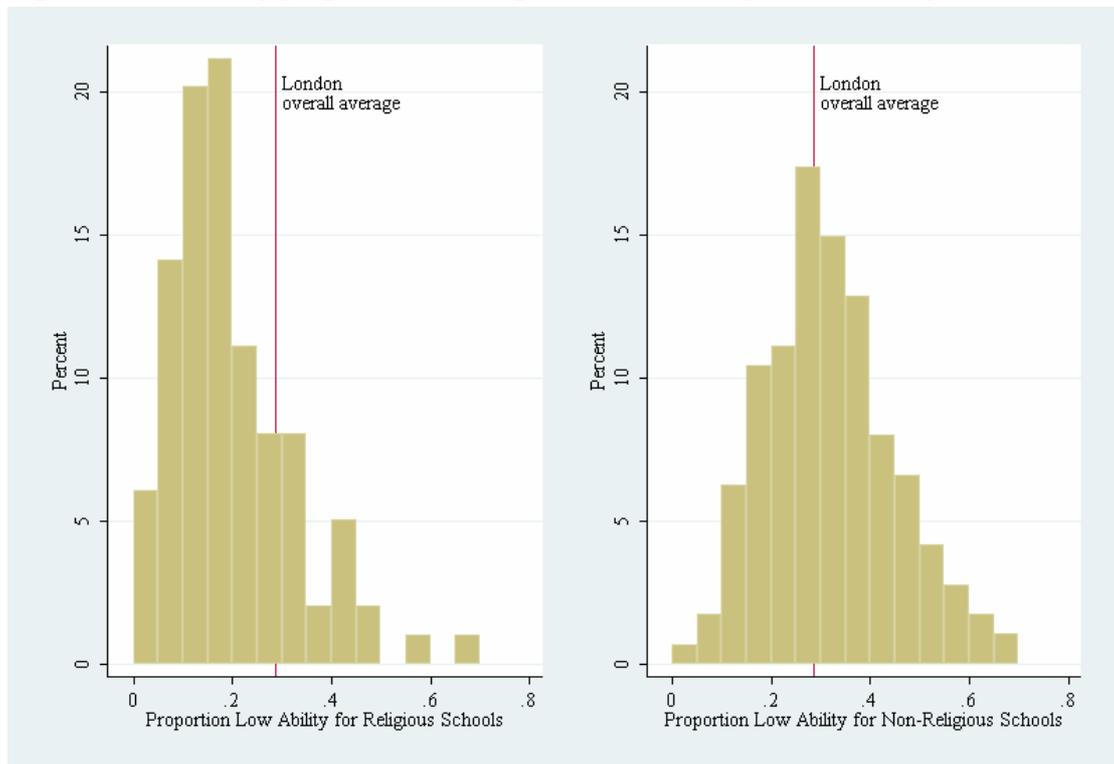
Figure 3 shows that 8% of religious schools have over 50% of their pupils who scored in the top 25% nationally on KS2 tests in primary school. This compares to less than 1% of non-religious schools. By cross-referencing to the database of admissions policies (used in West and Hind, 2006) we can see that all these schools operate complex admissions policies that may contribute to the under-representation of lower ability pupils. Five of the eight religious schools are operating a banding system (with three bands). Banding is encouraged under the School Admissions Code (DfES, 2007) on the basis that it allows a school to ensure that its intake is drawn from across the ability distribution. However, despite only one of these schools declaring they use uneven bands that favour higher ability pupils, all these schools have a highly selective intake. Two of these schools select 10% of their intake on the basis of an aptitude test. Others make reference to tests of religion, ethos, parent's active involvement in church, vicar or primary school references, and so on. Many of these practices are no longer allowed under the new School Admissions Code (DfES, 2007), and so it will be interesting to see whether the Code succeeds in encouraging a more balanced intake at these schools.

Figure 3: High ability proportions in religious and non-religious secondary schools



Despite the relative affluence of London's religious schools, Figure 4 shows there are nine religious schools that have twice as many low ability pupils as the national average (and 70 non-religious schools in this position).

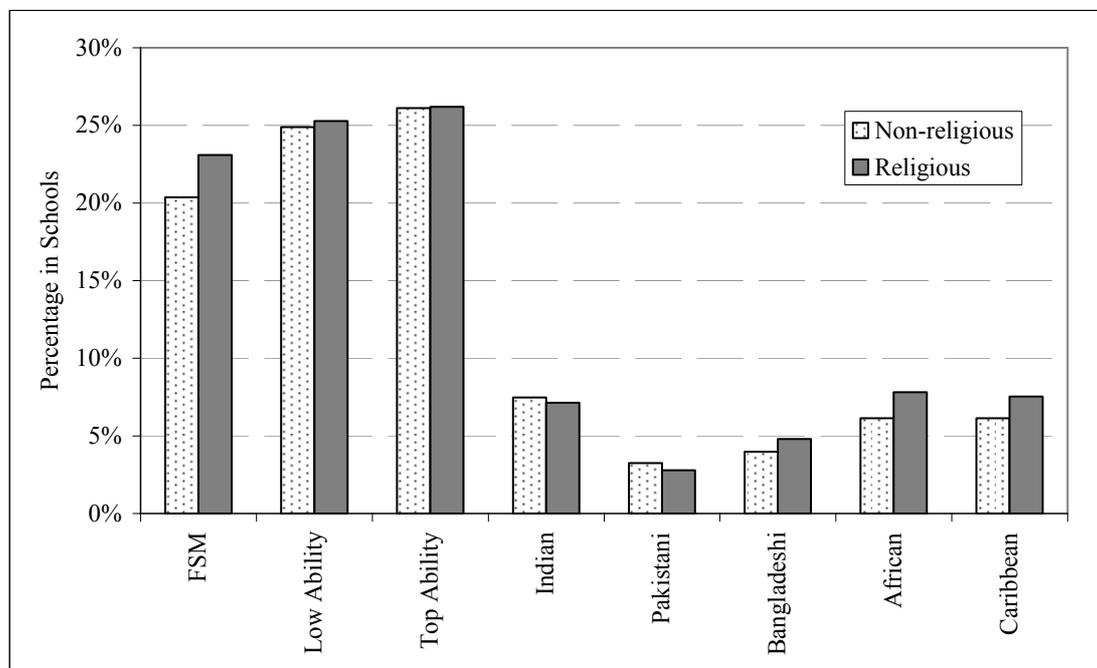
Figure 4: Low ability proportions in religious and non-religious secondary schools



Proximity Intakes of Religious and Non-religious London Secondary Schools

As described earlier, we examine the neighbourhood characteristics of religious secondary schools by looking at the social and ability composition of these schools if they accepted only pupils living closest to the school. Figure 5 shows that religious and non-religious schools are located in areas that are relatively similar in terms of affluence and ethnicity of residents. Religious schools are located in slightly more deprived areas (23% FSM eligible versus 20%). They also have slightly higher proportions of Bangladeshi, African and Caribbean pupils living close to the schools because they are disproportionately located in Inner London.

Figure 5: Neighbourhood characteristics of religious and non-religious secondary schools in London

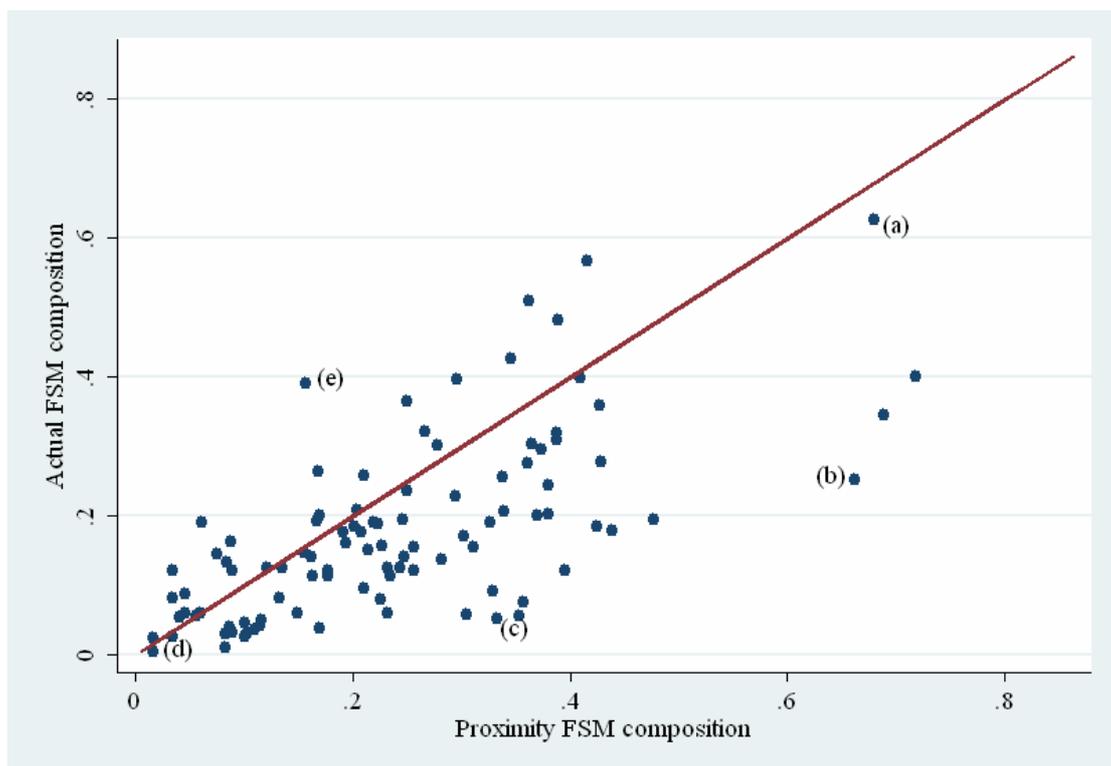


Comparisons of Actual and Proximity Intakes of Religious and Non-religious Secondary Schools in London

The scatter diagram in Figure 6 shows the actual FSM proportions of religious secondary schools in London (y-axis) compared to the proximity FSM proportions of their immediate neighbourhood (x-axis). The majority of religious schools have an FSM intake better than their proximity intake, so most dots fall below the 45 degree line. Five dots on Figure 6 are labelled to illustrate the circumstances of these schools:

- (a) This is a very deprived Church of England (C of E) school located in an equally deprived neighbourhood in the East End of London. Almost half the pupils at this school are of Bangladeshi origin and so are unlikely to be Anglicans.
- (b) This C of E school is just over 1 mile from school (a) and is in the same LEA. Despite its similar location in a very deprived neighbourhood, it has a FSM proportion that is typical of London overall.
- (c) These are Roman Catholic (RC) schools in Inner London with very affluent intakes, though the areas they are located in have quite high levels of income deprivation.
- (d) These very affluent schools in affluent neighbourhoods are all located in Outer London.
- (e) This is an RC school with a deprived intake that is located in a better than average neighbourhood. School (e) really is an outlier since most faith schools with deprived intakes are no more deprived than the area in which they are located.

Figure 6: Actual versus proximity FSM composition of London religious secondary schools



For the remainder of this section we compare the actual and the proximity intakes of religious schools in London by using the proximity ratio described earlier. This ratio is calculated for a series of social, ability and ethnic characteristics of school composition. Taking FSM pupils as an example, a school proximity ratio value of 2

tells us the school has twice as many FSM pupils than it would have if it educated its proximity pupils (and so has a deprived intake relative to its neighbourhood). A proximity ratio value of 0.5 tells us the school has half the number of FSM pupils that it would have if it educated its proximity pupils (and so is an affluent school relative to its neighbourhood).

Taking the group of London religious schools as a whole, Table 6 shows they educate only 85% of the FSM eligible pupils that they would if they educated pupils in the neighbourhoods where they are located. This means that FSM eligible pupils are over-represented in non-religious schools, who take 1.4 FSM pupils for every 1 FSM pupil who lives in the neighbourhood. Similarly, low ability pupils are under-represented and high ability pupils are over-represented in religious schools. South Asian ethnic minority groups are very under-represented in religious schools: only one in five Bangladeshi pupils living close to a religious school actually attend these schools. By contrast, Black ethnic minority groups are over-represented with around two black pupils in religious schools for every one black pupil who lives close to the school.

Table 6: Summary of proximity ratio for religious and non-religious secondary schools

	Non-religious schools		Religious Schools	
	Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D.
FSM	1.39	(0.73)	0.86	(0.63)
Lowest Ability	1.26	(0.41)	0.76	(0.42)
Top Ability	0.75	(0.34)	1.13	(0.62)
Indian	1.28	(1.42)	0.59	(0.81)
Pakistani	1.20	(1.06)	0.45	(0.81)
Bangladeshi	1.20	(1.04)	0.19	(0.40)
African	1.86	(2.87)	2.26	(1.97)
Caribbean	1.27	(1.07)	2.12	(3.18)

Note: African ethnicity proximity ratio greater than 1 on average for both non-religious and religious schools is possible where Africans are very concentrated in a few schools.

The next three figures show the distribution of the proximity ratio for the religious and non-religious sectors. Figure 7 shows that a majority of religious schools have fewer FSM pupils than they would under proximity, and also the long tail of non-religious schools that are educating many times more FSM pupils than live in their immediate neighbourhood.

Figure 7: FSM Proximity ratio for religious and non-religious secondary schools

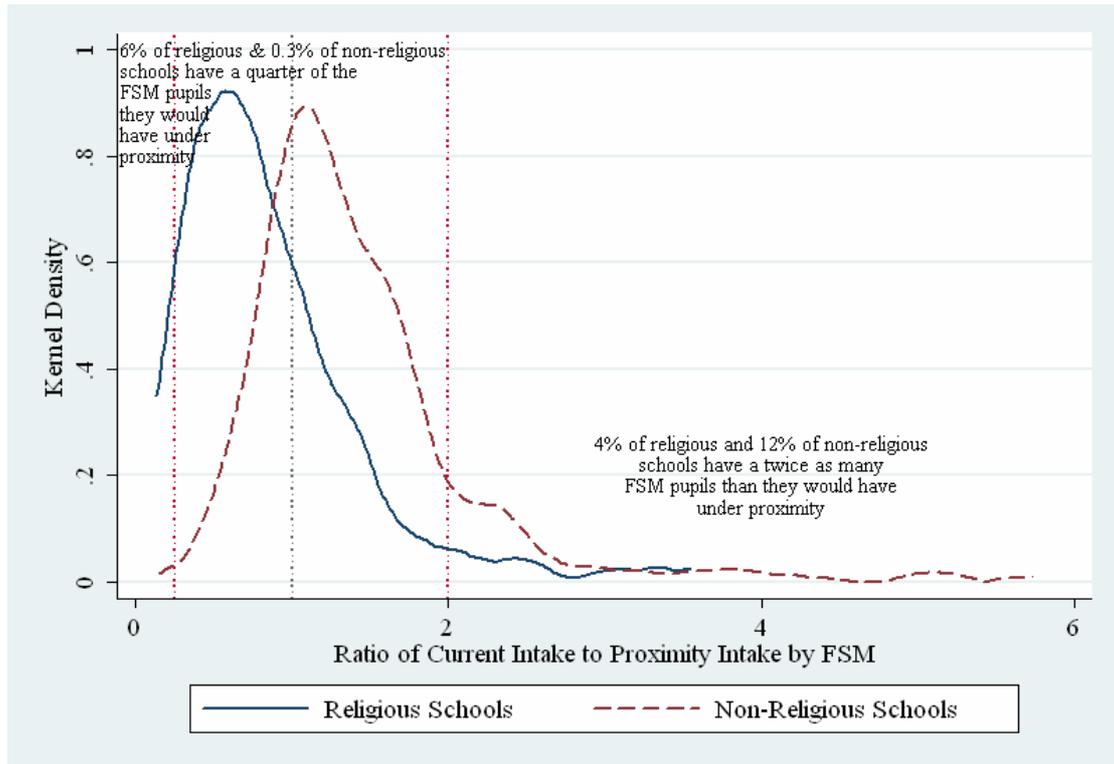


Figure 8 and Figure 9 show the distribution of the proximity ratio for high ability and low ability pupils.

Figure 8: High ability proximity ratio for religious and non-religious secondary schools

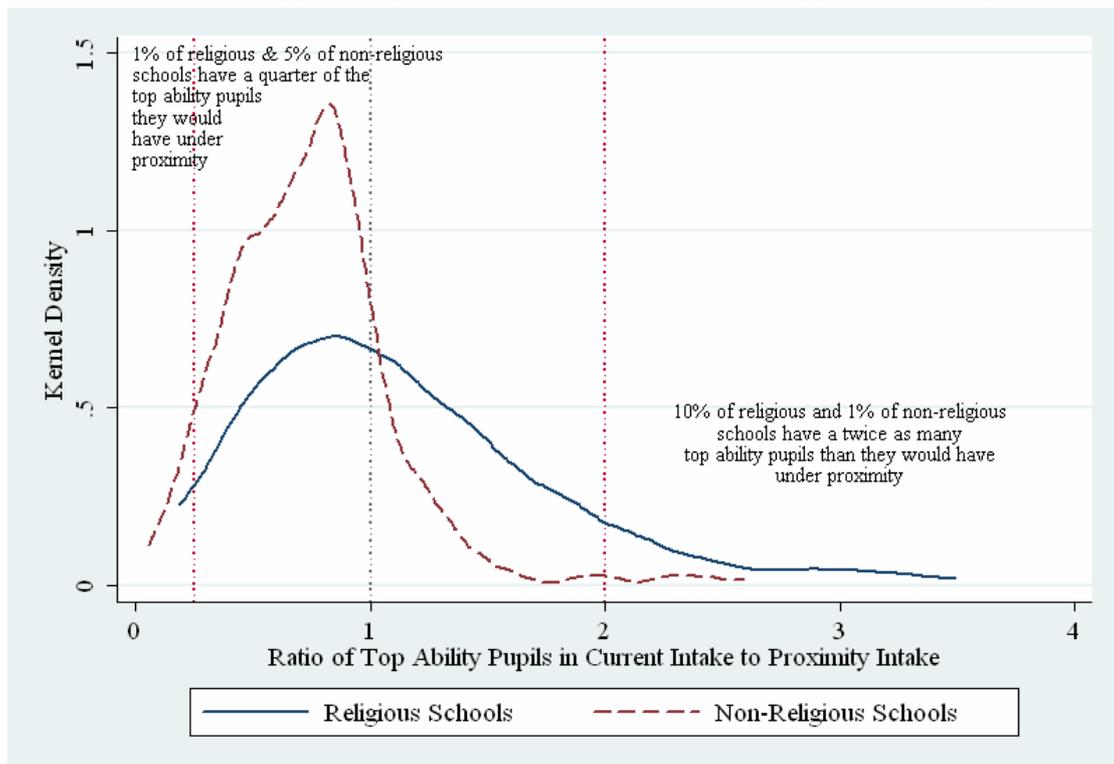
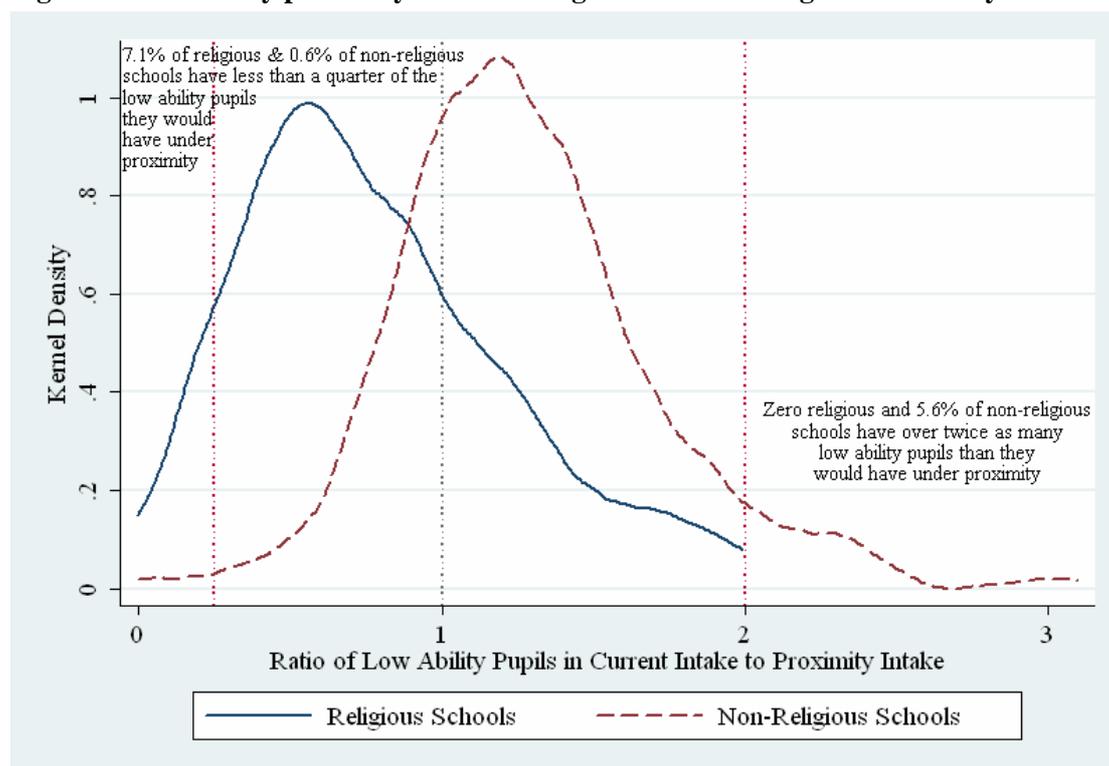


Figure 9: Low ability proximity ratio for religious and non-religious secondary schools



Parental Choices or Cream-Skimming? Exploring Reasons for the Existence of ‘Elite’ Religious Schools

As we have seen in the previous section, on average religious secondary schools have better intakes (in terms of the pupils being higher performing and more socially advantaged) than proximity, but within the sector there are a few schools for whom these figures are exceptional (called ‘elite’ schools in this section). There are only two ways any school can achieve an intake that is far more affluent than their neighbourhood: either low ability and poor families living close to the school are choosing not to apply for a place (perhaps in expectation of rejection); or these families are applying, but the school is using its admissions criteria to exclude them (see also West and Hind, 2007). Clearly, the moral implications of a religious school excluding poor children are less ambiguous than if poor families do not wish their child to attend in the first place.

It is difficult to disentangle these competing choice versus cream-skimming hypotheses in our data, but in this section we try to contribute to this debate by looking at whether there are pupils who live close to, but do not attend, an ‘elite’ Roman Catholic school, yet have a clear revealed preference for Catholic schooling because they attend another Catholic school. Given that the majority of pupils in

Catholic secondary schools in London are required to be Roman Catholics (Pennell et al., 2007), we know that these pupils will have satisfied Catholic credentials at another school. We are interested in whether these non-élite-school pupils of RC parents are more likely to be of low ability or income status. In other words, do the five élite RC schools we analyse here appear to cream-skim from the pool of pupils from local Catholic families?

For this analysis, we define ‘close to’ an élite RC school in two ways:

1. the group of proximity children who live directly adjacent to the school and would attend if the school accepted only its closest pupils;
2. the group of children who live within a 3 kilometre radius of the school (i.e. a walk zone).

Table 7 presents this analysis for five élite RC schools selected on the basis that their FSM proximity ratio was the lowest (0.25 or lower). The general pattern across these schools is that there are pupils who live close to these élite schools but who attend other RC schools. These non-attending RC pupils are more likely to be low ability or FSM eligible than the pupils who succeed in attending the élite school. Very few of these non-attending RC pupils are educated at a school with a higher ability peer group than the élite RC school they live near.

The 25 proximity pupils who live very close to School A but attend an alternative Catholic school have almost four times the rate of the FSM eligibility as those who attend school A (28.0% versus 7.7%). They are also far more likely to have scored in the bottom quarter in KS2 tests. School A is a school that uses banding to admit pupils, but also had a test of religious knowledge at the time these pupils would have started secondary school.

School B also has a large number of (male) pupils living very close to the school but attending alternative Catholic schools. These pupils have almost five times the rate of FSM eligibility as pupils at school B (26.8% versus 5.7%). Most (but not all) of these pupils are attending another RC school with a lower ability peer group. At the time these pupils entered school B, the school admissions included a long application form, primary school and vicar references, an interview of parents and an assessment of the parent’s involvement with the church.

Schools C and D are located in the same outer London LEA. Just 4 pupils living very close to school C attend an alternative RC school; many more live within 3km and these pupils have much higher FSM eligibility rates. School D has more RC pupils living locally but not attending the school. Many of these are FSM eligible, but others are successfully attending school C, which has the high performing peer group.

School E has no alternative RC schools nearby, hence few pupils live close to school E but attend another RC school. Those that do are not FSM eligible.

Table 7: Cream-skimming analysis of 5 elite RC secondary schools

School A =Inner London Roman Catholic Girls School				
	N	FSM	Low Ability	High Ability Peers?
Current intake	143	7.7%	6.3%	
Proximity pupils who attend other RC schools	25	28.0%	13.0%	0.0%
3km radius pupils who attend other RC schools	101	23.8%	16.7%	0.0%
School B =Inner London Roman Catholic Boys School				
	N	FSM	Low Ability	High Ability Peers?
Current intake	193	5.7%	4.2%	
Proximity pupils who attend other RC schools	41	26.8%	5.0%	17.1%
3km radius pupils who attend other RC schools	94	22.3%	15.4%	16.0%
School C =Outer London Roman Catholic Girls School				
	N	FSM	Low Ability	High Ability Peers?
Current intake	150	2.7%	4.1%	
Proximity pupils who attend other RC schools	4	0.0%	25.0%	0.0%
3km radius pupils who attend other RC schools	47	25.5%	23.3%	0.0%
School D =Outer London Roman Catholic Girls School				
	N	FSM	Low Ability	High Ability Peers?
Current intake	87	5.7%	11.9%	
Proximity pupils who attend other RC schools	24	16.7%	0.0%	41.7%
3km radius pupils who attend other RC schools	357	14.3%	18.5%	40.1%
School E =Outer London Roman Catholic Girls School				
	N	FSM	Low Ability	High Ability Peers?
Current intake	175	1.1%	9.2%	
Proximity pupils who attend other RC schools	3	0.0%	50.0%	0.0%
3km radius pupils who attend other RC schools	22	0.0%	19.0%	36.4%

The above analysis is repeated for the five Church of England denomination schools that scored lowest on the FSM proximity ratio. One again, for the most part, pupils living close to these elite C of E schools, but attending alternative C of E schools, are more likely to be FSM eligible or low ability than pupils in the elite school themselves. There are fewer C of E secondary schools than there are RC schools in London, so generally there are fewer pupils who live close to a C of E elite school but attend an alternative C of E school.

School F has an exceptionally small number of pupils who obtained low scores in their KS2 tests; this is likely to be, at least in part, a result of their uneven banding admissions scheme. By contrast, pupils who live close to school F but attend other C of E schools have FSM and ability characteristics more typical of Inner London. None of these pupils attend schools with superior peer groups.

School G is a partially (10%) selective school with very low FSM eligibility rates and few low ability pupils. This may be associated with the banding system used since pupils who live in the area but attend alternative C of E schools have high levels of FSM eligibility and are of a lower ability, on average.

School H has relatively few local pupils attending alternative C of E schools. The school itself has few FSM eligible children and a slightly higher ability intake overall than the non-attending C of E pupils in the area.

Schools I and J are located some distance from alternative C of E schools, so few pupils living in the direct locality attend other C of E schools. 73% of those living within 3km of school I are actually travelling to a school with a higher ability peer group.

Table 8: Cream-skimming analysis of 5 elite C of E secondary schools

School F =Inner London Church of England Girls School				
	N	FSM	Low Ability	High Ability Peers?
Current intake	90	12.2%	2.3%	0.0%
Proximity pupils who attend other CE schools	4	25.0%	25.0%	0.0%
3km radius pupils who attend other CE schools	44	22.7%	22.0%	0.0%
School G =Inner London Church of England Girls School				
	N	FSM	Low Ability	High Ability Peers?
Current intake	151	5.3%	6.0%	0.0%
Proximity pupils who attend other CE schools	24	33.3%	37.5%	12.5%
3km radius pupils who attend other CE schools	157	39.5%	29.1%	11.5%
School H =Outer London Church of England Mixed Sex School				
	N	FSM	Low Ability	High Ability Peers?
Current intake	105	3.8%	15.2%	0.0%
Proximity pupils who attend other CE schools	4	25.0%	25.0%	50.0%
3km radius pupils who attend other CE schools	56	5.4%	11.1%	44.6%
School I =Outer London Church of England Mixed Sex School				
	N	FSM	Low Ability	High Ability Peers?
Current intake	79	7.6%	8.9%	0.0%
Proximity pupils who attend other CE schools	0	-	-	0.0%
3km radius pupils who attend other CE schools	33	21.2%	21.9%	72.7%
School J =Outer London Church of England Mixed Sex School				
	N	FSM	Low Ability	High Ability Peers?
Current intake	181	6.1%	16.9%	0.0%
Proximity pupils who attend other CE schools	2	50.0%	-	0.0%
3km radius pupils who attend other CE schools	21	9.5%	10.5%	4.8%

Discussion

It is clear from our analysis that many religious secondary schools in London are not serving the most disadvantaged pupils. Overall, religious schools educate a much smaller proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals *and* their intakes are significantly more affluent than the neighbourhood they are located in.

It might be expected that religious schools would have similar missions to the Church of England and Roman Catholic Church in terms of seeking to provide education for the poor; however, when we consider London religious secondary schools as a whole, there appears to be a mismatch.

Some London religious schools may have undergone a ‘distortion of mission’ as happened with the elite public schools, which were set up to educate the poor but then shifted their focus and catered predominantly for the wealthy. However, other London religious schools were formerly independent fee-paying or academically

selective grammar schools and, as such, they may be seeking to retain their original mission and pupil mix.

What is clear is that within the religious sector there are both Catholic and Anglican socially selective ‘élite’ secondary schools which appear to ‘select out’ low income religious families, thereby displacing them to religious schools with less affluent composition. We identify, on the basis of our analysis, two admissions practices that are present at these socially selective ‘élite’ schools: collection of information to assess ‘religiosity’ and use of school-administered ability banding. Previous research suggests that other admissions criteria and practices, such as pre-admission interviews, and other selective and potentially selective criteria, also play a role (West et al., 2006) and would have been in place at the time our Year 11 cohort was admitted to secondary school.

In policy terms, given the concerns about schools’ selective admissions practices, the School Standards and Framework Act 1998 and accompanying codes (DfEE, 1999, DfES, 2003) and the Education and Inspections Act 2006 have sought to tackle these through measures such as placing a ban on interviewing parents and pupils and strengthening the status of the School Admissions Code (DfES, 2007). However, it is not clear that the changes will widen access to the most over-subscribed religious schools. Our view is that the sanctioning by the School Admissions Code of the collection of additional information from parents and religious leaders to determine ‘degree of religiosity’ ensures that religious schools continue to have a means to socially select pupils, should they wish to do so. This could be overcome by the introduction of a mechanism administered by the churches/religious bodies themselves by which families can prove their religious commitment. Religious schools could then rely solely on the presence of a signature on a form from a religious leader to decide who should be admitted (with a lottery or proximity rule in the event of oversubscription). Moreover, once ‘religious’ is defined as a binary indicator that families either have, or do not have, there would be no arbitrariness in the admissions criteria and so there is no reason why, in the interests of transparency, efficiency and equity, an organisation external to the school should not administer the admissions process.

A second aspect in many admissions criteria that appears to be used in a discriminatory manner by socially selective religious schools is banding. This is one

of the key mechanisms proposed by the School Admissions Code (DfES, 2007) to ensure fair access to all pupils. However, the banding that is advocated is not across an area but limited to one or more schools. This is significant. When banding was used by the former Inner London Education Authority (ILEA), individual voluntary-aided schools administered their own admissions, but concerns were expressed about the way in which banding was used by these schools with some parents and teachers believing that:

the system is distorted by some voluntary-aided secondary schools who have the right to choose their entry. There is evidence that a few unnecessarily take a disproportionate number of pupils from Band 1. It is said that others conform to the letter of the agreement in taking appropriate numbers of children from each of the three bands, but get an entry with higher than average achievement by taking applicants from the top of each band... (ILEA, 1985, p. 58).

Much has been written elsewhere about the problems associated with schools administering their own banding (e.g., West, 2005). Here we reiterate that a school-level system of banding amongst all applicants meeting the required criteria gives schools very strong incentives to ensure that the pool of applicants from which they administer the banding is of a high ability on average. This can be achieved by discouraging applicants who live in lower income areas and encouraging applicants (via school prospectuses, explicit marketing and other devices) from affluent areas.

Given the historical role religious schools played in the development of education for the poor, it is unlikely there will ever be an entirely secular schooling system in England. Indeed, given clear popular support for many of these schools, it is not evident that secularisation would improve the overall quality of schools. Our research does however, raise the question about the extent to which religious schools are catering for the poorest children in London. Further, given the clear concerns raised in this paper about the role of religious schools in contributing to ethnic and social stratification in London (see also Allen, 2007), policymakers might want to think once more about how changes in the School Admissions Code can help produce a more cohesive generation of children.

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