DIVERSIFYING PUBLIC EDUCATION OR CREATING A TWO-TIER SYSTEM? LESSONS FROM ENGLAND.

John Fitz, Stephen Gorard and Chris Taylor
Cardiff University School of Social Sciences

Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association, New Orleans, 1st-5th April, 2002

Correspondence:
Dr John Fitz
Cardiff University School of Social Sciences
Glamorgan Building
King Edward Vll Avenue
Cardiff CF10 3WT
44 (0) 29 20 875093
fitz@cardiff.ac.uk

DIVERSIFYING PUBLIC EDUCATION OR CREATING A TWO-TIER SYSTEM? LESSONS FROM ENGLAND

John Fitz, Stephen Gorard and Chris Taylor
Cardiff University School of Social Sciences

1. INTRODUCTION

Programmes to diversify public education operate in both the US and the UK. Magnet schools and the progressive roll out of charter schools in the US were intended, *inter alia*, to provide opportunities for the creation of different kinds of public schools, to contribute to raising levels of attainment, and extend parental choice. In the UK, the introduction of the specialist schools programme, first introduced in 1993, had similar purposes. It was specifically justified on the grounds that it would 'significantly enhance the diversity of secondary education' through the introduction of schools that had a 'distinctive mission and ethos'. On either side of the Atlantic there have been fears that these initiatives would not only diversify public education but that they would also create two-tier systems. Magnet school, charter schools and specialist schools were presented as having two advantages: more resources and the capacity to engineer their intakes so as to filter out low attaining and poorly motivated students.

Our interest in this area arises from the UK Labour government's commitment to diversifying secondary school provision by increasing the number of specialist schools, from the present number of 600 to 1000 in 2003, and 1500 by 2006, or about 40% of all state secondary schools in England. The specialist school programme has several features that might give rise to segregation and a two-tier system. First, the schools apply for entry to the programme on a competitive basis. They are required to specialise in a curriculum area (initially technology, languages, sport and arts, but now also includes business and enterprise, engineering, mathematics and computing and science), and most importantly they are allowed to select up to 10% of their intake on the basis of aptitude in their specialism. Second, they are required to raise £50,000 of sponsorship towards a designated capital project, after which they can apply for *additional* capital and recurrent grants of up to £600,000. This money must be spent on enhancing the facilities that are required for the school's particular

specialism. Specialist schools can also expect to receive a recurrent budget of £123 per pupil per year for the first four years to implement their specialist programme. Approximately a third of this should be targeted to assist in sharing innovative and best practice with other local non-specialist schools. These are schools working with a distinct advantage in as much as they have a measure of control over their intake and that they will enjoy extra resources. Moreover, they will form a distinct sector within public education.

In addition the government is also supporting the expansion of faith-based schools state schools. State support for church schools is unconstitutional in the US. In the UK, however, under the provisions of the 1944 Education Act, in contrast of the US, former church schools, the majority being either Church of England (CoE) or Roman Catholic (RC), could apply for 'voluntary status'. In effect, they became state schools, with governing bodies composed of church and local education authority representatives. In recent years this status has been extended to a very small number of Muslim schools. The recent Labour government initiative was justified on the grounds that it extended the choice of schools available to parents. Faith based schools retained the right to control their admissions policies in order to provide places for families who were committed to a religious education and in order to sustain the ethos of the schools. Critics have argued however, with some justification, that interviews conducted with applicant families can become a convenient form of selection by proxy, a process which screens out less desirable students and families (BBC, 2002a: 2002b: Toynbee, 2001).

The government argues that specialist schools represent a modernisation of the comprehensive system that will contribute to its overall programme of raising standards by generating and disseminating good practice in specialist areas. Critics are concerned with several aspects of the push for diversity via specialist and faith-based schools. Both assume control of their own admissions policies, unlike ordinary comprehensive schools. The consequence, it is argued will be to re-introduce 'selective education' by engineering their intakes to choose the most able or motivated recruits (Thornton, 2001: Hattersley, 2002). This provides a market advantage within the competitive UK system of provision as well as achieves better student performance figures at the expense of other school in the area. Aside from

philosophical arguments about state funding for religious schools, faith based schools in the British context can be seen as contributing to and sustaining ‘parallel communities’ where ethnic and language communities are educated in different schools (Willis, 2002: Garner, 2002). Also faith-based schools have historically been associated with selection, by interviewing able, well motivated children, often acting as havens for disaffected parents seeking an alternative to the neighbourhood comprehensives. The resource advantages and clear mission enjoyed by specialist schools set them apart from adjacent schools and provide a further market advantage. It is for these reasons that critics are concerned that a two-tier system is beginning to emerge, exacerbating existing structures of inequality in British schooling.

The aim of this paper is to examine the scale, character and scope of diversity in the British system UK, particularly to: a) investigate the programmes origins and antecedents; b) outline character and pedagogic focus of specialist schools; c) devise quantitative techniques to measure the social composition and attainment of school in different sectors of public education; d) analyse the social composition of specialist and faith based schools; e) compare admission policies and intakes of specialist and faith based schools with neighbouring state secondary schools; f) compare student attainments at specialist and faith-based schools and local state schools. Our purpose in pursuing these questions is to provide an analytic account of a flagship policy of the present Labour Government and determine whether there is evidence that a two-tier system has been established or is emerging.

This paper emerges from a larger study aimed at investigating the long term effects of markets in education that also has the broader purpose of contributing to the wider debates about the consequences of ‘choice’ and ‘competition’ in the arena of public policy (Gorard & Fitz 2000). Earlier studies of the impact of educational markets in the UK and in New Zealand suggested that educational markets gave rise to the social segregation of schools and to situations where schools entered ‘spirals of decline’ – losing students and resources (Gewirtz et al. 1995; Lauder et al. 1999). The study on which this paper draws is distinctive in that it is underpinned by a large data base comprising selected socio-economic and performance data (as measured by student attainment in national assessments) over the last decade for all 3,778 secondary schools in England and Wales. In addition it features a socio-economic index to

measure the extent to which claims about markets creating socially stratified patterns of secondary school provision can be justified (Gorard & Taylor *forthcoming*). In a series of papers we have demonstrated that the relationship between educational markets and the social stratification of schools is not what neo-liberal critics claimed, nor what market advocates proposed. UK schools have been socially stratified in the past, related mainly to the nature of catchment areas and residential segregation, but there is no evidence to show that they have become more so since the introduction of choice and competition policies in public education. This paper continues that investigation by examining whether diversity of provision, and specialist and faith-based schools in particular, can and do cause stratification between public secondary schools.

Alongside diversification there is also a standards agenda, namely that these schools are also to act as schools of excellence within the arena of public education. Claims have already been made that after controlling for intakes, students at specialist schools are more successful in public examinations than their non-specialist counterparts (Jesson, 2001). Similar findings have been presented for faith-based schools (Burn et al., 2001).

2. FROM DIVERSITY TO PLURALITY

Since 1944 the British education system can be characterised as *plurality* in provision, where parents were presented with a variety of different forms of secondary schooling. They have been able to choose between state and private education, between LEA and church schools, between single sex and co-educational schools, and, in some areas, between selective and non-selective schools, though not all parents have had the same degree of choice. Parents in Wales can also choose between Welsh medium schools, where Welsh is the language of instruction, and English medium schools.

Nevertheless, some form of allocation of children to school places has operated in local education authorities (LEAs) in order for them to fulfil their statutory obligation to provided a place for all children in their administrative boundary of compulsory

school age. The allocation procedures have always varied across LEAs and they have shifted modes over time. For example, from 1944 until the late 1960s tests at 11 plus distributed secondary school children between schools on the basis of ability. With the development of all-ability comprehensive schools, which about 92% of all state secondary students in England and approximately 99% in Scotland and Wales presently attend (Benn and Chitty, 1996), allocation has featured geographical proximity through school transport policies that generally encourage families to use their nearest schools. Nevertheless, parents particularly in urban areas, prior to 1988, enjoyed a considerable measure of choice even in left-leaning LEAS such as the Inner London Education Authority, between different types of state schools (Hargreaves, 1996).

It is the neo-liberal policy framework of the Education Reform Act 1988, and subsequent legislation where calls for *diversity* emerged. Diversity in this sense was seen as a key element in constructions of quasi markets in education. Here the quest was to create state schools outside the control of LEAs and thus give parents a choice between LEA and self-governing schools. The City Technology Colleges (CTCs) programme, which commenced in 1986, represents the first move in this direction and established a pattern for the creation of different kinds of state schools, much of which is evident in today's specialist schools. CTCs were distinctive in that they had a specific curriculum (science/maths/technology) focus, they were intended to be state-private partnerships involving sponsors who would provide site and building, and they were outside the control of LEAs and would receive government grants to support their specialised work. They were intended to be beacons of excellence and contribute to the raising of standards in the system. As the policy unfolded it became increasingly clear that its intentions were not being fully met, and indeed the involvement of private sector sponsors fell well short of expectations (Whitty, Edwards and Gewirtz, 1993).

Diversity was taken further forward in the 1988 Act, a central feature of which was the grant-maintained (GM) schools initiative that enabled schools, after a ballot of parents, to opt out of LEA control, achieve a greater measure of autonomy and receive funding directly from central government (Fitz, Halpin and Power, 1993). In the CTC and GM schools initiatives LEAs were clearly seen as barriers to change and raising

standards and so diversity denotes creating schools outside LEA control while keeping them in the state system. A subsequent consultative Green Paper in 1992, called *Choice and Diversity in Education* (DFE, 1992) followed by new legislation, became a platform on which to extend diversity via the Technology Schools Initiative. GM and voluntary schools could apply for technology status, initially in the areas of science/technology, language and sports and receive substantial grants to develop their curriculum specialism. More importantly they were allowed to select up to 10% of their intake by aptitude or ability. In the 1996 the principle of selection was extended by enabling GM schools to apply to change their admissions policies and select up to 20% of their intake. The conservative government was voted out of office before these measures came into effect.

The perils of devolving admissions policies to GM schools became apparent in the mid-1990's especially in the Greater London area and south east England where it became increasingly difficult for parents in some LEAs to obtain places in nearby high performing secondary schools (Fitz et al., 2002) In part, this triggered corrective measures contained in the 1999 School Standards and Framework Act, which introduced, amongst a raft of reforms designed to drive up standards, codes of practice, admissions forums and school adjudicators whose purpose was to smooth out difficulties in the admissions process in each LEA. These difficulties were most intense in areas with high concentrations of GM schools. The legislation also revised the way in which schools were to be governed and grouped: state schools as 'community schools' (schools under LEA control), voluntary aided schools (VA) (in the main, faith based schools) and 'foundation schools' (the great majority being former GM schools) (White et al 2002). VA and foundation schools still control their own admissions policies but within a framework designed to co-ordinate school admissions across each LEA.

Diversity in the British context then has been associated with building a state school sector outside, and therefore undermining, LEAs, funding advantages for self-governing schools, giving some schools control over their own admissions policies and the extension of the principle selection. It is in this light the present government's attempts to modernise the comprehensive system of education have been interpreted as extending policies and practices likely to lead to a two-tier system. Is there any

evidence that this has worked out in practice? We examine whether this is so by examining the funding, social composition and student attainment in school in each of the sectors.

3. FUNDING AND SCHOOL DIVERSITY

Faith-based state schools are funded for recurrent costs on the same basis as other LEA controlled schools. Under the provision of the 1944 Education Act though, school could choose 'aided' status where church authorities had to meet 15% of capital costs of any project and 'controlled' status where the LEA funded the total capital costs of projects. These rules still apply. It could be argued that in a multi-faith Britain there remains little justice in subsidising church schools at the present level given the very low rates of church attendance that occur in civil society. Specialist schools are very different in terms of funding.

Under the formula we noted earlier specialist schools receive additional grants of up to £100,000 in matched funding, for capital works and £123 per student per annum. These funds are over and above what they would receive, year on year, via the age-weighted formula funding through their LEAs and therefore over and above what adjacent schools receive. Case studies of what this means is an undeveloped area of research. However, work undertaken by one our graduate students, Michael Steer, gives some measure of the advantages enjoyed by school with specialist status (1).

Collingwood Community College (all names of school have been changed) enrols 1230 students aged 11-18 and is designated as a sports college. It has raised £123,000 from sponsors and has also received an initial matching government grant of £100,000. In addition, it receives £123,000 pa in recurrent funding. Because of its specialist status it is also able to participate in other initiatives, such as acting as a training school for teacher education, and these have boosted its total additional income to £350,000 per year. Site improvements include a tennis dome with two new courts, a dance studio, enlarged fitness suite with upgraded changing rooms, and new 'smart boards' in classrooms and a supply of new laptop computers. The teaching staff has been enlarged by the addition of two full time staff working in partner

primary schools and three other secondary schools, a full-time tennis coach and a dance teacher. There are also resources for teachers to undertake research projects here and overseas.

Footscray College is a specialist technology college with 1500 students aged 11-18 on roll. It raised £100,000 from sponsors and had an initial grant of £100,000. It also receives an additional £150,000. Capital works include building alterations to accommodate new computer networks, and the school has also bought new computers and peripherals such as digital cameras. The recurrent grant has paid for adddtional maths and technology teachers. Essendon Community College has 1322, 11-16 students and specialises in languages. It received £100,000 from sponsored matched by the initial capital government grant. Since 1997 it has had an annual grant of £130,000. Capital grants paid for new buildings for the computer network and an international resource based learning centre as well as refurbishment of language classrooms. The annual grant supports an overseas-qualified teacher, a Japanese student, a community teacher working in local primary schools and it entitles 200 students to travel overseas each year.

Aside from the extra learning experiences that our case study specialist schools seem to afford their students there are two other potential advantages, although further research over an extended period of time will be needed to resolve their effects. The first is the impact of increased resources on student levels of attainment. The second is the market advantages that may accrue from new buildings and extra resources and also from the control they have over admissions policies. Here interest also lies in the extent to which specialist schools also become socio-economically segregated from LEA secondary schools and it is to this issue we now turn.

4. SOCIO-ECONOMIC SEGREGATION AND DIVERSITY

The analysis below of specialist schools is derived from our datasets of the pupil composition and achievements of all schools in England and Wales from 1988 to 2001. It also draws on earlier studies of ours on the composition of specialist schools in England and patterns of underachievement in secondary schools. A fuller statement

of the evidence underpinning the arguments presented here can be found in their relevant publications. There is insufficient space to rehearse here the sources, analyses, and findings of our wider study - a summary of which can be found in Gorard et al. (2001) or Gorard and Fitz (2000a) (2). However, we use here the areal segregation index and, in particular, the school-level segregation ratio, both outlined elsewhere (Gorard & Taylor 2002; Gorard & Fitz, 2000b). The segregation ratio is a measure that indicates whether a school is over- or under-represented with children eligible for free school meals (or other indicators such as additional educational needs, ethnic group, and first language). The measure is standardised such that changes in the overall levels of poverty between each LEA, and over time, are accommodated. It is simply the proportion of disadvantaged children in the school (in this case with eligibility for free-school meals, FSM) divided by the proportion of disadvantaged children in the area of analysis.

We have also conducted interviews with admission officers and school headteachers in over 35 LEAs across England and Wales, purposely chosen to reflect variations in geography, admissions procedures, and levels of socio-economic segregation between schools. Of these 35 LEAs only nine had existing specialist schools, and we consider these in more detail here (28 schools in total). These 28 specialist schools represent all forms of specialisms that a school can currently have, and represent all types of state-funded school (e.g. community, foundation and VA). We then discuss the scope and character of the specialist schools programme and suggest how this interacts with existing patterns of segregation and then report on the extent to which the specialist and other faith based schools can be seen to be segregating away from LEA secondary schools. This discussion also shows how complex ‘diversity’ is in England and Wales

General findings on diversity

Socio-economic segregation of student compositions, as assessed by the proportion of pupils with a specific characteristic who would have to exchange schools for this characteristic to be spread fairly, declined from 1988 to 1997 (Gorard 2000). This decline in segregation was measured in terms of poverty, special need, first language and ethnicity. The period involved increasing parental choice, a growth in out-of-catchment placements, and a large growth in appeals. Regions, such as Wales, in

which the ‘bog standard comprehensive’ have been unchallenged by grant-maintained, fee-paying, selective schools and City Technology Schools have markedly lower levels of segregation than the national average. One possible conclusion is that choice *without* diversity tends to lead to lower levels of segregation than simple allocation of school places by area of residence (Taylor and Gorard 2002).

This improvement appeared in all economic regions, and most local authorities. However, areas of England that have retained or created diverse school types since 1989 provided exceptions. In general, LEAs with higher proportions of foundation, selective or specialist schools have higher levels of socio-economic stratification between schools. They also tended to remain static, showing less change in the already specified indicators of improvement over time (Gorard and Fitz 2000b). Within LEAs the relationship between school types and segregation is an ogival one. Areas with high levels of selective, voluntary-aided, grant-maintained or fee-paying schools had higher levels of segregation than their neighbours, and show no change in segregation over time (e.g. Bromley, Buckinghamshire, and Haringey). Areas with large changes in segregation over time or lower initial levels of segregation contained only LEA-controlled comprehensive schools. Diversity *with* choice therefore appears to tend towards segregation/selection. This remains the case in the analysis of our national dataset whatever the publicised criteria of allocation to schools are (and the considerable range of these criteria can be seen in White et al. 2001). These general findings spell out a possible warning for a policy, such as the current one, that combines parental choice, school specialisation, and schools acting as their own admission authorities.

The rise of the specialist school

The rise of the specialist school may worsen the general situation described above, and it is the case that general segregation by poverty is beginning to rise again. The number of schools awarded specialist school status in England has increased almost year-on-year since they were first introduced in 1994 (Figure 1). There was a slight fall in the number of schools entering the programme between 1998 and 1999. However, between September 1999 and September 2000 there were 134 new

specialist schools raising the total number of schools on the programme to 529. By March 2001 there were already 73 schools designated as specialist schools that year, well on the way to equalling the take up for 2000.

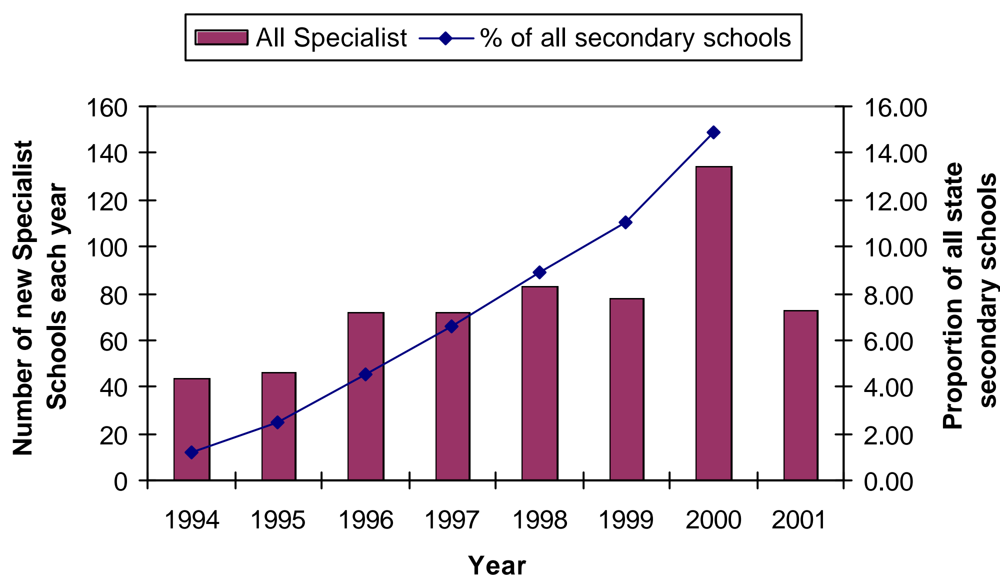

Figure 1. The rise of specialist schools, by year: England 1994-2001

NB. Figures are given for September of each year with the exception of 2001. Figures for 2001 are the number of schools 'designated' specialist school status as at March 31 2001, and will, therefore, not be the final figures for 2001. These schools join the programme in September 2001.

The year-on-year rise in the number of schools entering the specialist school programme has ensured that such schools are now a significant feature of the education landscape (Figure 1). By September 2000 just less than 15% of all state secondary schools were on the programme. According to the Government's targets specialist schools will account for an estimated 28% of all secondary schools by the year 2003. This proportion should be considered against the fact that the heavily-researched foundation (FD) schools and voluntary aided (VA) schools, two key elements of school diversity, account for 14% and 15% of secondary schools respectively. However, within the specialist school programme there is considerable overlap between these two types of schools. The early specialist schools were either foundation or voluntary controlled schools. However, community schools now provide the largest share of specialist schools, followed by foundation schools, voluntary aided schools and voluntary controlled schools. But these are, of course, not

proportionally representative of the overall composition of secondary schools in England. Only 15% of community schools are currently on the specialist school programme compared with around 26% of all foundation schools. Community schools remain under-represented on the programme.

As already indicated there have, until very recently, been four forms of specialism a school can have:

1. technology (technology, science and mathematics)
2. languages (MFL)
3. sports (PE and sport)
4. arts (fine, performing and media arts).

By September 2000 the majority (58%) of schools on the specialist school programme had technology college status. This was in comparison to language colleges (19%), sports colleges (12%) and arts colleges (11%). It can be seen that the current pattern of specialisms that schools have is largely a product of the earlier introduction of first technology college status, followed by language college status, and then arts and sports college status (Figure 2). In 2000 technology colleges still accounted for the greatest share of new specialist schools. Meanwhile, the other forms of specialisms were being introduced at an equal rate.

One of the potential criticisms of the specialist school programme is that membership may not be representative of all schools. In particular member schools may tend to be under-represented in socially disadvantaged areas. To examine the geography of the specialist school programme we will focus on Local Education Authorities (LEAs), which we have shown elsewhere to be the most useful unit for analysing competition between schools (Taylor et al. 2002).

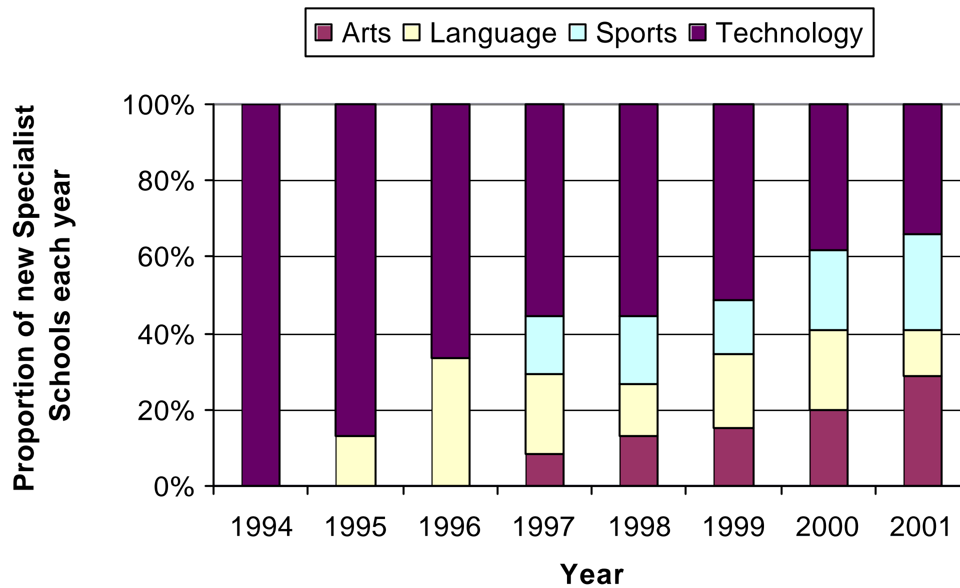

Figure 2. Start-up of new specialist schools, by form of specialism and by year: England 1994-2001

Specialist schools are unequally distributed across LEAs. By March 2001 there were still 14 LEAs in England that did not have any schools on the programme. This contrasts with Wandsworth where more than half of the schools were on the programme, encompassing 64% of the secondary school age population. Similar proportions can be found in Hackney, West Berkshire and North Somerset. In Birmingham there are a total of 21 secondary schools on the programme, the highest in England. This is closely followed by 18 in another large LEA, Essex. Generally it is urban LEAs that have the highest proportion of schools on the programme. But there are a number of key exceptions to this, including Cornwall (35% of schools), Durham (33% of schools), and Gloucestershire (29% of schools).

However, at an aggregated level this regional imbalance does not necessarily serve the critics' assertion that specialist schools will tend to be located in relatively advantaged areas. Figure 3 illustrates the relationship between the proportion of schools on the programme and the DfEE's Additional Educational Needs Index, which measures levels of social and educational disadvantage, for every LEA in England.

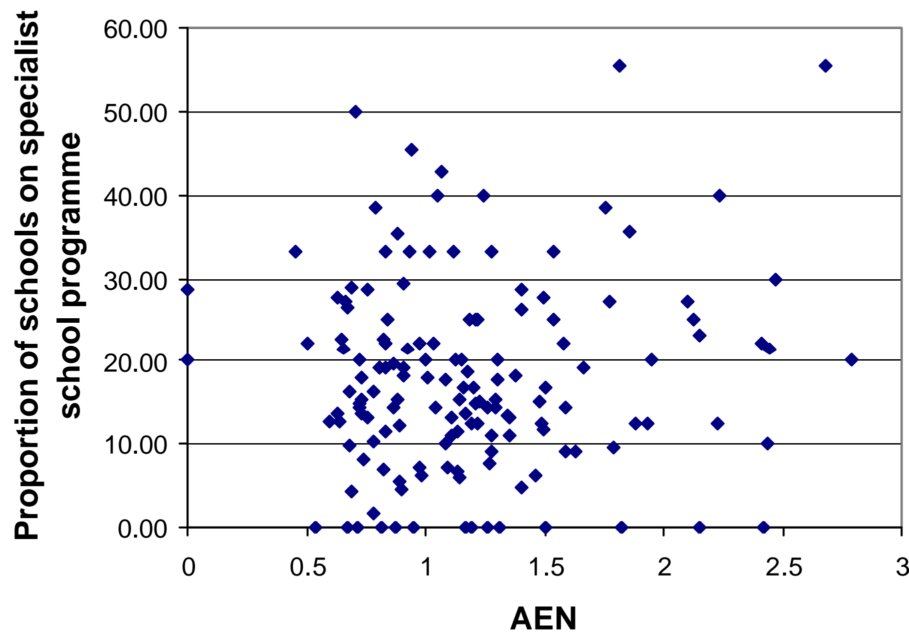

Figure 3. Relationship between levels of social and educational disadvantage and incidence of specialist school programme: England March 2001

Socio-economic segregation between schools

Given that there is no clear evidence that specialist schools are appearing more often in particularly privileged or disadvantaged areas, the next section of the paper considers the extent to which their intake reflects the local population of the areas they are in. 29% of secondary schools in England became more 'privileged' in their intake between 1994/95 to 1999/00. In this instance, more 'privileged' means that these schools already had less than their local 'fair share' of children from families in poverty, as measured by their entitlement to free school meals, **and** that this proportion, over time, declined further (i.e. their segregation ratio was less than one, and moved away from one over time). It is, in essence, these 29% that are driving the move towards greater overall segregation in the system since 1997 – although there are, as ever, regional variations in this from 24% of schools segregating in the North West to 35.4% in the Eastern economic region. This trend towards segregation is considerably worse in grammar (69%) and upper-age 14-18 comprehensive (66.7%) schools than among secondary-modern (16.9%) or 11-16 comprehensive (16.1%)

schools for example. It is also worse among all specialist schools combined (37.2%), particularly those for languages (42.9%), and foundation (42.6%), and voluntary-aided CE (56.8%) specialist schools. The latter is particularly interesting showing that, however neutral the school admissions policies are except with respect to religion, religious specialist schools are attracting or 'selecting' an increasingly privileged intake and this has implications for the current commitment to expand this sector as well.

While the pattern is complicated by age-range, gender mix, and local authority, it is the case that those schools taking an increasingly privileged intake tend to be specialist, or selective, or their own admission authorities (e.g. GM or VA). Where more than one of these is the case the tendency is significantly enhanced. While 16.5% of the total school intake was eligible for free school meals in 2000, in specialist schools this was only 14.4%. However, this overall figure hides the variation within the specialist school programme. Specialist schools for sport and arts have similar compositions to all schools, and the difference lies in the technology and especially the language schools (10.2% FSM). There is also variation by *type* with community specialist schools being more similar in composition to their non-specialist counterparts, while all other school types are more privileged, especially voluntary-aided catholic specialist schools (only 7.1% FSM) and selective schools (2.1%). This raises the question of whether it is the specialism, the prior school type, or the interaction between the two that is driving the segregation? Because of complexities noted above the following discussion examining the impact of specialist school status on admissions focuses on more detailed case studies of nine English LEAs and their respective schools (28 in total).

Of these 28 schools ten had increasingly privileged intakes over time, as determined by their segregation ratios. Only five schools increased the relative proportion of children eligible for free school meals between 1994, the first year of the programme, and 2000. The intakes of two of these were still under-represented with such children relative to other schools in their particular LEAs. The remaining thirteen schools saw no significant change to the composition of their school intakes, although 'no change' includes having maintained an already privileged intake.

The most notable feature of the ten polarising schools was that these were all their own admission authority, i.e. they had autonomy in their admissions arrangements from their respective LEA. This meant that they were able to apply their own oversubscription criteria, and in the order they preferred. The relationship between the autonomy in admissions and their specialist school status can impact on their intake in two stages. First, since specialist school status increases the popularity of a school (West et al. 2000) these schools are simply more likely to apply their oversubscription criteria, whatever these are, than other schools. And second, their oversubscription criteria could be applied to ensure they get the most able and consequently the most socially 'advantaged' children. The three most-used criteria were: selection by aptitude; interviews for religious affiliation; and the use of the family rule.

Few specialist schools report using selection by aptitude in their admissions (West et al. 2000). Of our 28 schools only four selected a proportion (10% in all cases) of their intakes based on aptitude in the relevant specialist subject. Three of these were VA (religious) schools and, consequently, also required parents to show their religious affiliation. One of these schools distinguished admission places allocated by selection and admission places allocated on religious grounds. However, the 'selective' places would only be allocated from those that applied, typically those that would have traditionally sought a place at this school. In the other two VA schools, both Roman Catholic schools, 10% of places were reserved for children that could prove their aptitude in the specialism **and** whose parents proved their commitment to the Roman Catholic faith. This could be seen as 'selection within selection', almost guaranteeing that these schools admit the most academically able children.

It is perhaps not surprising therefore that the selective specialist schools, including the selective foundation school, have admitted an increasingly socio-economically 'advantaged' set of children (Figure 4). This indicates that these schools over time became increasingly under-represented with children eligible for free school meals, relative to other schools in their LEA (where a segregation ratio of one represents a school perfectly in proportion with its LEA).

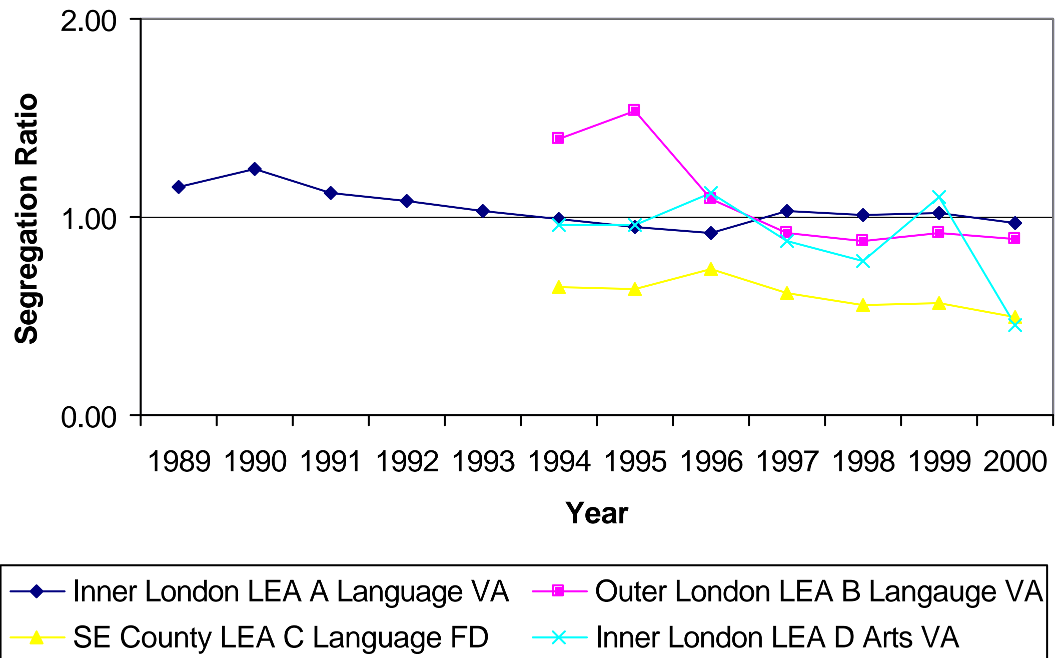

Figure 4. Selective specialist schools – change in composition of school intakes

Of the remaining 24 specialist schools in the detailed sample, another six had significant falls in their segregation ratios, again indicating that they became increasingly segregated, from other schools in their LEA, with more socially 'advantaged' children (Figure 5). Even though none of these schools applied the selection by aptitude criteria in allocating places they still had autonomy in their admission arrangements. Typically they required parents to show their commitment to a religious faith (see above) or applied oversubscription criteria, such as the family rule, to provide 'selection by proxy', i.e. where parents are more likely to be given a place because of allocative procedures applied before the programme was instigated and before the 1998 Schools Standards and Framework Act attempted to make oversubscription criteria more fair and transparent.

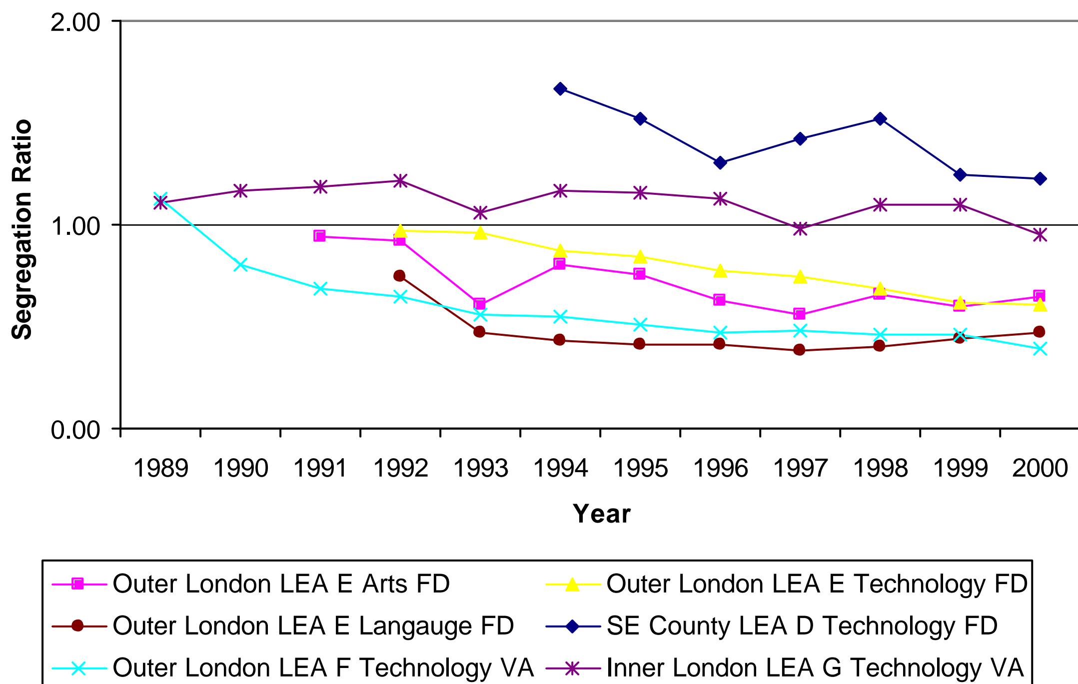

Figure 5. Non-selective specialist schools – increasingly socio-economically advantaged intakes

In one LEA (Outer London LEA E) for example, all three specialist schools there have always had less than their fair share - around half - of local poor students. And, since becoming specialist schools these have seen their share fall further. Thus, although not selective at all, these three ex-grammar foundation schools were managing to recruit an increasingly privileged intake, and were therefore more likely to be successful in examination terms and so gain further in market appeal. One reason for this may be the family rule, whereby priority is given to those whose family members had previously attended or worked at the school. Another may be glimpsed in the views of the admissions officer in the LEA:

> I think we've got two at the moment. One's a language college and therefore highly sought after because if you're doing languages you're going to be bright and if you're bright it's going to be a good school, and if it's a good school you're going to go there. There is another one... but I think they're looking at that way to increase the ability levels of their intake, although of course it's only allowed to be a small percentage. But the knock-on effects.

However, in the sample there were three other specialist schools who had autonomy for their admissions yet did not show any indication of having more socially 'advantaged' intakes over time. Indeed these three schools took more children eligible for free school meals over time, relative to other schools in their LEA (Figure 6). Their stories may explain this apparent contradiction. First, the two specialist schools in Outer London LEA B typically have unfilled places each year (Fitz et al. 2002). In other words these schools would appear to be unpopular, even given their new status. Consequently these schools have not generally over the period been in a position to employ their own over subscription criteria, irrespective of whether they have the particular criteria that would cream-skim their applicants. The third school is located in a south-east LEA H, and, uniquely it could be said for foundation schools, uses the same over subscription criteria promoted by the LEA in all other schools. Hence this school, it could be argued, is in no 'better' position to cream-skim its applicants than any other school. In addition the particular over subscription criteria used in this LEA is 'designated areas'. As long as the applicant lives in the designated area of a school they are almost guaranteed a place in that school.

This discussion has tended to focus on foundation or VA specialist schools. However, this has been data-driven, as these are the schools whose intakes have changed significantly over time. These types of schools are more likely to use selection by aptitude in their admissions, or have benefited via their over subscription criteria from the potential increase in popularity arising from their new status. Where there have been exceptions to this the unique situations of such schools has helped explain their non-conformity.

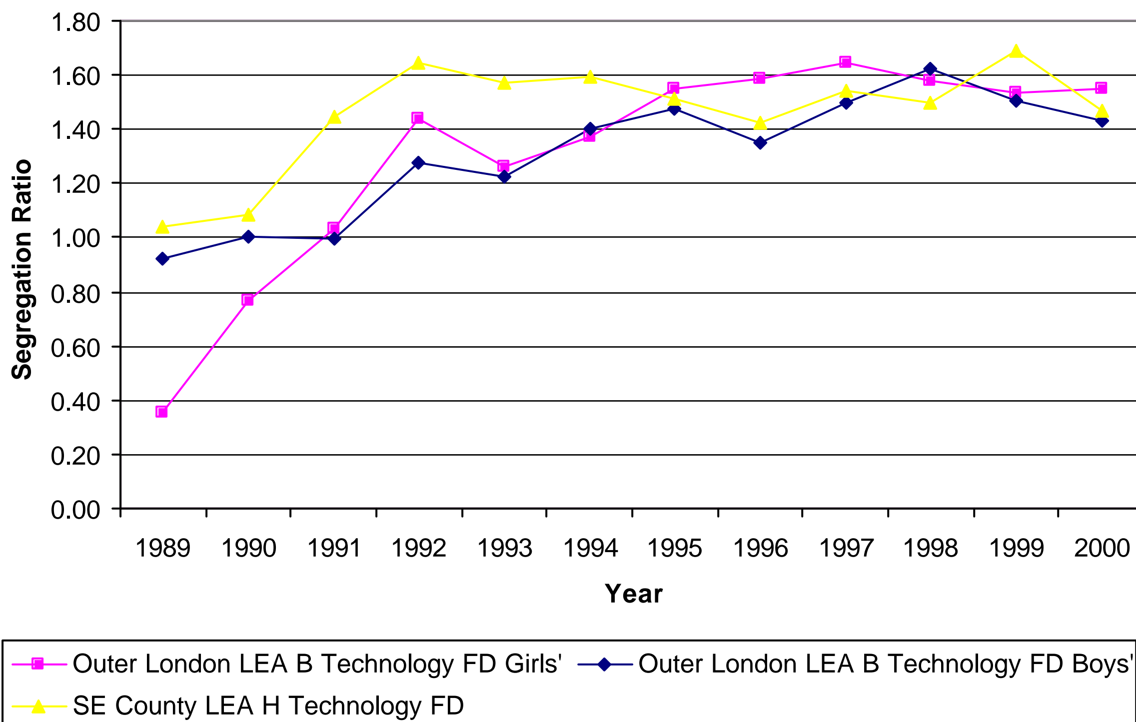

Figure 6. Non-selective specialist schools with autonomy for admissions – increasingly socio-economically advantaged intakes

Segregating towards a two-tier system?

We now turn our attention to voluntary aided and foundation schools – other schools that control their own admissions policies - to examine further the idea of two-tier system. The data below is drawn from a sample schools across 30 LEAs (totalling 754 schools) that is, approximately 20% of all secondary schools and LEAs in England. Comparisons between the social composition of VA schools and other kinds however, can be misleading because they are geographically unevenly distributed. VA schools tend to be located in urban areas with relatively more children eligible for free school meals and may not therefore, fully represent the effect of local admissions policies. Moreover there are very different concentrations in regions across England. Care also has to be taken to exclude VA grammar schools in order to draw better comparisons between aided and LEA schools because grammar schools in general have very low proportions of their intake eligible for free schools meals. In

Table 1, below, we have also included foundation schools in our comparison of school types.

Table 1. Proportion of total intakes (sample-wide) eligible for free school meals

School types	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000
Community (no grammar) (n = 465)	14.41	15.77	15.93	16.47	16.63	15.57	14.84	14.47
All VA (no grammar) (n = 106)	13.42	14.70	15.18	15.13	14.87	14.19	13.43	12.76
Foundation (no grammar) (n = 159)	10.57	12.02	12.22	12.34	12.24	11.67	11.21	10.63
Proportional difference: Com - VA	*0.0357*	*0.0349*	*0.0243*	*0.0422*	*0.0558*	*0.0466*	*0.0499*	*0.0630*
Proportional difference: Com - FD	*0.1537*	*0.1349*	*0.1317*	*0.1432*	*0.1521*	*0.1433*	*0.1393*	*0.1528*

The difference between community and VA schools is relatively small and indeed much smaller than the gap between community and foundation schools. The striking feature in the table is the privileged intake of foundation schools and one that has been maintained over time in the transition from GM to foundation status. While the socio-economic characteristics of VA and community schools are similar account has to be taken of the fact that there may be very different kinds of VA schools so far not reflected in these figures and further work needs to be conducted before this can be determined. Our interview data though points in the direction of schools that serve local (often deprived) commuities and those which serve the diocese and/or a larger catchment area that may apply more 'selective' admissions rules. There are slight differences in student attainment between Church of England and Roman Catholic Schools as measured by Key Stage and GCSE assessments (Burn et al, 2001) and this may well reflect differences in intakes. It may well also be the case that community and VA schools have marked contrasts in the ethnicity of their intakes and this is an area we will examine in on-going work. In Figure 7 the chart further reports the consistent difference between VA and community schools over time. Again it demonstrates that the gap is small although it is growing.

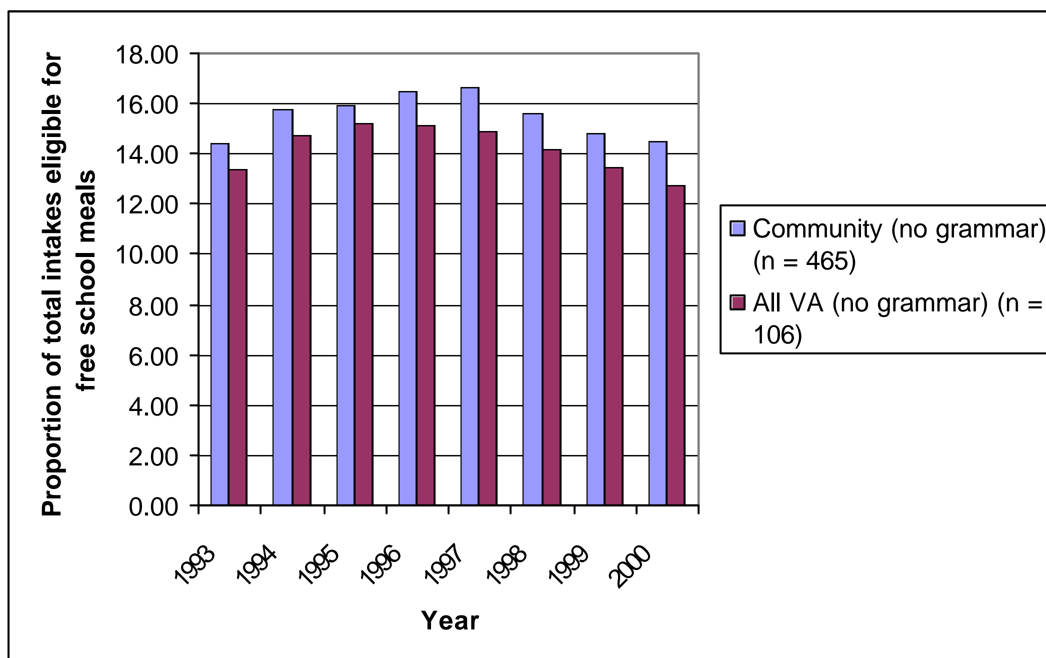

Figure 7. Socio-economic composition of Community and VA (faith-based) schools, 1993 to 2000 (sample of LEAs in England)

Another way of exploring the two-tier concept, and drawing on the same sample, is to compare schools by examining the extent to which they have become more 'priviliged'. Just to recall the earlier definition of what more 'privileged' means is that these schools already had less than their local 'fair share' of children from families in poverty, as measured by their entitlement to free school meals, **and** that this proportion, over time, declined further. So which categories of schools have moved towards more privileged intakes? In Table 2 we show which schools have reduced the proportion of students entitled to FSM and have segregated 'downwards' from their 'fair share'.

The table is a vivid demonstration of the continuing socio-economically privileged intake of selective grammar schools compared with other categories of schools. Overall, about 30% of school have moved away from receiving their fair share of FSM students, though the percentage of community schools doing so is less than either voluntary aided or foundation schools. The fewer proportion of foundation schools becoming more 'privileged' as opposed to VA (faith-based) and grammar (selective) schools relatively small rate of change for foundation school should be

considered alongside the fact that these school had privileged intakes from the beginning of our study period, and that recent admissions policies have stil had some impact upon their recruitment patterns. The overall picture though is one where the more autonomous school segregate away from LEA schools over time.

Table 2. Increasing downward segregation 1994/5 –1999/00

School type	Total number	Number more 'privileged'	Percentage more 'privileged'
All schools	754	223	29.58%
Community schools (no element of diversity)	465	109	23.44%
Foundation schools (no grammar)	159	50	31.45%
VA schools (no grammar)	106	48	45.28%
Grammar schools	20	15	75.00%

5. STUDENT ATTAINMENT AND DIVERSITY

Our discussion here will be necessarily brief because we are at the beginning of our analysis of differences in student performance in the various categories of secondary schools. Other research has noted that church schools are doing better than LEA schools in Key Stage assessment and GSCE but not as well as might be predicted (Marks, 2001). For example Marks reports that at CoE schools about 51% of students achieve 5 GCSEs grades A*- C (the official comparator employed in reporting school performance data) compared with about 42% of LEA and 49% of RC schools. Jesson et al (2001) as we noted earlier, also find that specialist schools out-perform LEA schools with about 54% of students at specialist schools achieving 5 GCSEs A*- C, compared with 45% in non-specialist comprehensives.

Our own findings set out in set out in Figures 8 and 9 bring together data on the dependent variable of school examination performances with independent variables such as free schools meal eligibility, levels of absence and levels of children with special educational needs. The methodology is explained in full in Gorard (2000b).

The dependent variables are the percentages of students in each category of school achieving 5 GCSEs A*-C. The most significant predictor of GCSE scores is the percentage of students eligible for free school meals accounting for 75% of the variance in the GCSE benchmark (5 grades A*-C). From this we identified categories of schools achieving over or under predicted outcomes for 1995 (Figure 8) and 1999 (Figure 9) when social composition, and other background factors, are taken into account. Our concern is primarily with specialist and voluntary aided schools and their performance in relation to LEA community schools.

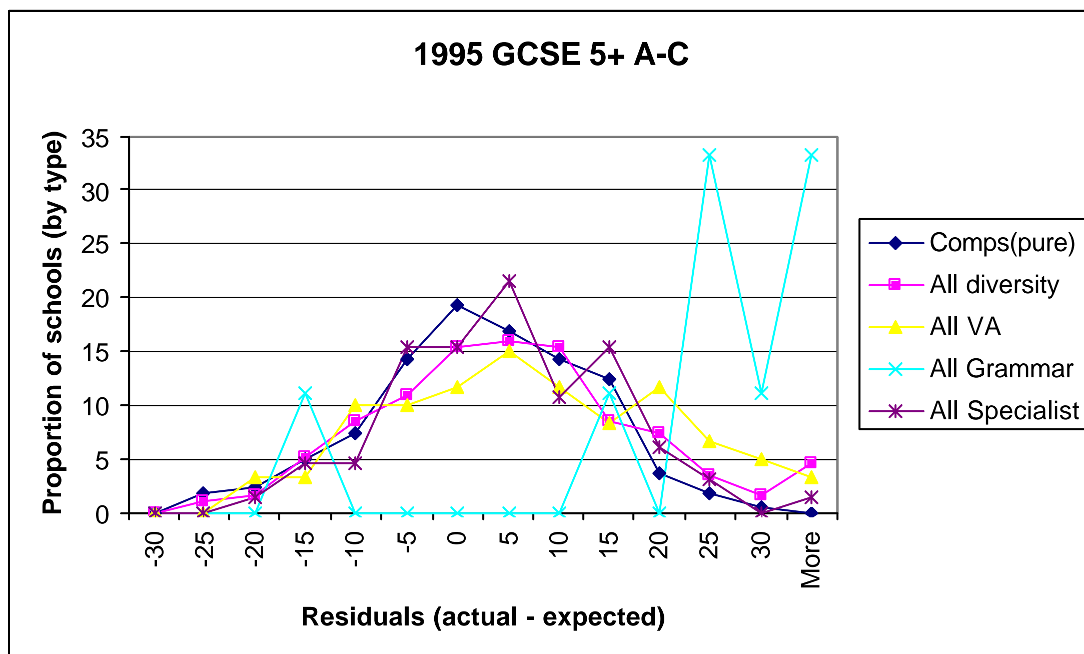

Figure 8. Over- and under-performance of schools, by type, 1995

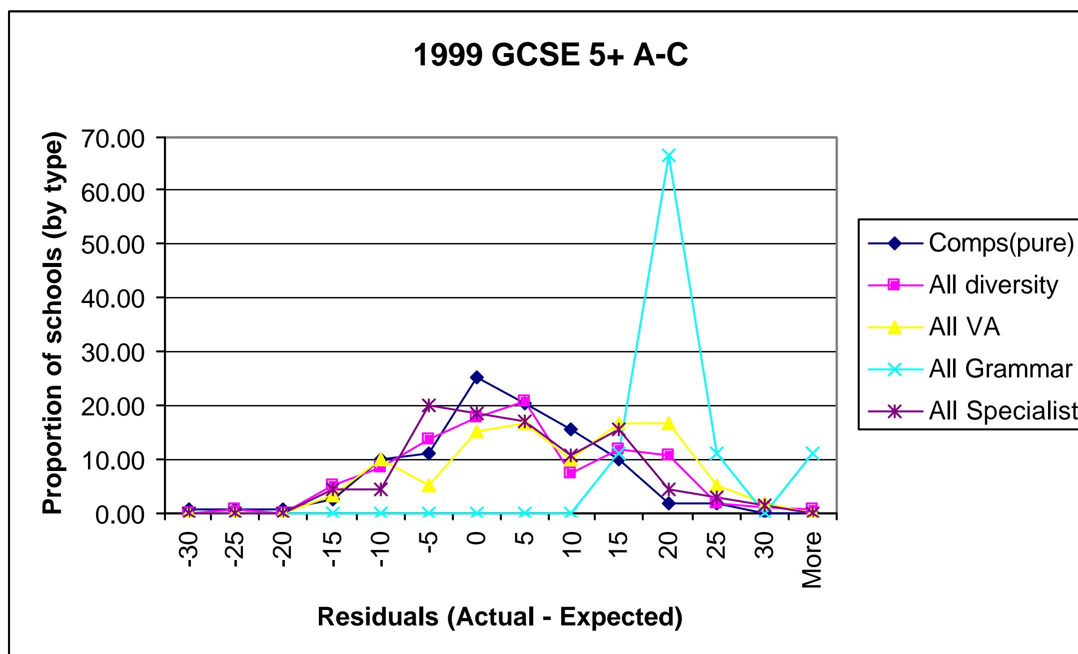

Figure 9. Over- and under-performance of schools, by type, 1999

The charts suggest that student attainment in VA schools was somewhat better than would be predicted and better than comparable levels of student attainment in LEA community schools, although the difference, may, indeed, not be that great. It is most notable that there are two ‘peaks’ in the VA figures which may suggest that there are two groups of VA schools with different levels of performance at the end of compulsory education. As suggested earlier these figures may mask the fact that VA schools can serve two very different communities: locally deprived areas with limited religious emphasis placed on their admission procedures; and geographically larger dioceses where a commitment to a particular religion is central to their admission policies.

The difference between the under- and over-performance of specialist schools was not that great in 1995 nor 1999, relative to other forms of school diversity. However, it is worth observing that the difference between such schools and community schools was smaller in 1999 once the programme expanded to include, what were previously, traditional community schools.

Clearly further work is needed here to determine amongst other things whether sport, languages and technology specialist schools generate GCSE results better or worse

than predicted and what the underlying mechanism of the 'twin peaks' in the VA scores is. Whether the differences in attainment we see arise from the greater resources at the command of specialist schools and whether the so-called ethos of VA schools has some impact are also areas for further investigation.

6. CONCLUSION

So what about the emergence of a two tier system, one in which some schools are advantaged by the relatively 'privileged' social mix in the student population, more resources and better results in national assessments? Specialist schools are advantaged in resource terms in comparison with LEA community schools. This programme however, is one of number, such as Excellence in Cities, the City Academies programme and Education Action Zones, where participating schools are in receipt of resources over an above the per capita formula-determined recurrent funding received by LEA schools.

When we turn to socio-economic segregation and performance the picture is somewhat complex, due to local market situations. It would appear that the specialist school programme *per se* does not lead to a two-tier system of admissions. The evidence from this study does show that specialist schools that retain some autonomy over their admissions arrangements are less likely to admit pupils living in poverty. Combining the 'specialist school' form of diversification with the 'school autonomy' form of diversification, as represented by voluntary aided and foundation schools, is leading to a two-tier education system. This process arises in two stages. First, since specialist school status increases the popularity of a school (West et al. 2000) these schools are more likely to apply criteria in allocating places when they are oversubscribed than other schools. And second, their over-subscription criteria can be applied to ensure they get the most able and consequently the most socially 'advantaged' children. Policy-makers need to weigh up the purported advantages of specialist schools – in urban areas with preferential funding – against the potential disadvantages in terms of equity. In particular, there needs to be a balance between the advantages and disadvantages of different forms of school diversification in the market place.

NOTES

1. We are grateful to Michael Steer for sharing with us his fieldwork data. His research is supported by a Teacher's Bursary from the General teaching Council for Wales. The authors assume full responsibility for the interpretation of the data.
2. The methodology underpinning our segregation index and segregation ratio can be found in the Occasional Papers and in other publications on our website, www.cardiff.ac.uk/socsi/markets

REFERENCES

Burn, J., Marks, J. Pilkington, P. and Thompson, P. (2001) *Faith in Education*, London, Civitas

DFE (1992) *Choice and Diversity: a new framework for schools*, London, HMSO.

DfEE (2001) *Schools: Building on Success*, HMSO: Norwich.

Fitz, J., Taylor, C., Gorard, S. and White, P. (2002) Local education authorities and the regulation of educational markets: four case studies, *Research Papers in Education*, 17,2 1-22

Fitz, J., Halpin D. and Power, S. (1993) *Education in the Market Place*, London, Kogan Page

Garner, R. (2001) Inquiry urged into faith schools plan, *Independent*, 6th November, downloaded from www.independent.co.uk

Gewirtz, S., Ball, S. & Bowe, R. (1995) *Markets, choice and equity in education*, Buckingham: Open University Press

Gorard, S. (1997) *School Choice in an Established Market*, Ashgate: Aldershot.

Gorard, S. (1998) Four errors.... and a conspiracy? The effectiveness of schools in Wales, *Oxford Review of Education*, 24, 4, 459-472

Gorard, S. (1999) 'Well. That about wraps it up for school choice research': a state of the art review, *School Leadership and Management*, 19, 18, 25-47

Gorard, S. (2000a) *Education and Social Justice*, University of Wales Press: Cardiff.

Gorard, S. (2000b) Underachievement is still an ugly word: reconsidering the relative effectiveness of schools in England and Wales. *Journal of Education Policy*, 15, 5 pp. 559-573

Gorard, S. and Fitz, J. (2000) Markets and stratification: A view from England and Wales, *Educational Policy* , 14, 3, 405-428

Gorard, S. and Fitz, J. (2000b) Investigating the determinants of segregation between schools, *Research Papers in Education* , 15, 2, 115-132

Gorard, S. and Taylor, C. (2002) What is segregation? A comparison of measures in terms of strong and weak compositional invariance, *Sociology*, (forthcoming)

Gorard, S., Fitz, J. and Taylor, C. (2001) School choice impacts: what do we know?, *Educational Researcher*, 30, 6

Gorard, S. and Taylor, C. (2001) The composition of specialist schools in England: track record and future prospect, *School Leadership and Management*, 21, 4 , 365-381

Hargreaves, D. (1996a) Diversity and choice in school education: a modified libertarian approach, *Oxford Review of Education*, 22, 2, 131-141.

Hargreaves, D. (1996b) A reply to Walford, *Oxford Review of Education*, 22, 2, 155-157.

Hattersley, R (2002) Selection returns by stealth, *Guardian*, 25 February, p.16

Higham, J., Sharp, P. and Priestly, M. (2000) Developing diversity through specialisation in secondary education: Comparing approaches in New Zealand and England, *Compare*, 30, 2, 145-162.

Jesson, D. (2001) *Educational outcomes and value-added analysis of specialist schools for the year 2000*, Technology Colleges Trust: London.

Lauder, H. & Hughes, D. (1999) *Trading in futures: why markets in education don't work*, Buckingham: Open University Press.

Marks, J. (2001) Standards in Church of England and Roman catholic Schools, in England, in Burn, J., Marks, J. Pilkington, P. and Thompson, P. (eds) (2001) *Faith in Education*, London, Civitas , 5-36

PriceWaterhouseCoopers (2001) *DfEE RR242 Building Performance: an empirical assessment of the relationship between schools capital investment and pupil performance*, DfEE: London.

Taylor,C (2001) The new geography of choice and diversity in the 'new secondary education market of England, *Area*, 33,4, 368-381.

Taylor, C. and Gorard, S. (2002) 'Local schools for local children' and the role of residence in segregation, *Environment and Planning A*, (forthcoming)

Taylor, C., Gorard, S. and Fitz, J. (2002) The modifiable areal unit problem: Segregation between school and levels of analysis, *International Journal of Social Research Methods*, (forthcoming)

Thornton, K. (2001) Specialists spark 'two-tier' fears, *Times Educational Supplement*, 8/6/01, p.34

Toynbee, P. (2001) Keep God out of class, *The Guardian*, 9th November, downloaded from www. http//education.guardian.co.uk 20/3/02

Walford, G. (1996a) Diversity and choice in school education: an alternative view, *Oxford Review of Education*, 22, 2, 143-154.

Walford, G. (1996b) A rejoinder to Hargreaves, *Oxford Review of Education*, 22, 2, 159-160.

Walford, G. (2000) From City Technology Colleges to Sponsored Grant-maintained schools, *Oxford Review of Education*, 26, 2, 145-158.

West, A., Noden, P., Kleinman, M. and Whitehead, C. (2000) *DfEE RR197 Examining the impact of the specialist schools programme*, DfEE: London.

White, P., Gorard, S., Fitz, J. and Taylor, C. (2001) Regional and local differences in admission arrangements for schools, *Oxford Review of Education*, 27, 3

Whitty, G., Edwards, T. and Gewirtz, S. (1993) *Specialisation and Choice in Urban Education: the City Technology Colleges experiment*, London, Routledge

Willis, P. (2002) Increased tension, *The Guardian*, 4th February, downloaded from http://education.guardian.co.uk