What factors influence parental preference of schools, and what are the outcomes of those preferences (and for whom)?

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Contents

1. Introduction: scope and overview

In this project, we were tasked to answer the question, '**What factors influence parental preference of schools, and what are the outcomes of those preferences (and for whom)?**'

To address this question, we begin with a brief discussion of school choice policies around the world, followed by a review of other research on parental preference in school admissions in England. We then examine four Cambridgeshire-specific data sources: school admissions statistics for September 2018 entry; an original survey of Cambridgeshire parents on their experiences and opinions of school admissions; summaries of appeals lodged against school admission allocations; and interviews with a headteacher and a school business manager.

Our initial meetings with Councillors and Council senior officers made us particularly interested in within-county differences in the equity of access to school preference, whether due to rurality, family socioeconomic resources, or other factors. In our analysis, we focus on state-funded primary and secondary schooling. (Privately funded school admissions are beyond the remit of the Council, and post-16 educational options are being addressed by another Policy Challenges team.)

This project would not have been possible without the support of Cllr Ian Manning as well as Gwendolyn Casazza, Maddie Alpar, and Kevin Hoctor of the Council's Transformation Team, who provided advice, contacts, coordination, and encouragement throughout this process. We are also grateful to the following people for kindly taking the time to meet with us and share their insights: Cllr Simon Bywater, Cllr Samantha Hoy, Mike Soper, Hazel Belchamber, Sam Surtees, Briony Davies, Rob Lewis, and Rosemarie Sadler. The Council's Business Intelligence team generously shared data on school admission applications; and the Communications and Web teams offered invaluable help in distributing the parent survey. Jamie Carr of LGSS Legal assisted by summarising a selection of the admission appeals cases heard this year. Special thanks also to the anonymous headteacher and school business manager who provided valuable on-the-ground perspectives.

- Throughout the report, each major section begins with a grey box. These boxes are <u>not</u> overall summaries. Rather, they highlight the most salient or striking observations from each section.
- Each paragraph is summarised by a topic sentence in **boldface**.

2. School choice and parental preference around the world

- Many countries give parents some degree of choice in the schools their children attend.

- These school choice policies may contribute to school improvement and may help underprivileged children to access a wider range of schools.

- However, in some contexts, school choice policies may also widen educational gaps between more and less privileged families—partly because underprivileged families sometimes lack access to information about schooling.

While some countries expect children to enrol in their nearest local school, many countries give parents some degree of school choice. A 2012 OECD analysis found that over two-thirds of OECD countries had increased opportunities for parental choice of schools over the preceding 25 years.[1] These school choice policies can differ considerably. For example, some education systems, like England's, allow parents to register preferences of state-funded schools but retain the authority to allocate children to schools. Other systems allow parents a choice of any public or private school, with 'vouchers' for per-pupil funding following the child wherever they are enrolled. Depending on how the system is designed, these vouchers may be available either to all children or only to those deemed socioeconomically disadvantaged. Some systems allow families to top-up the value of the per-pupil vouchers in order to access more expensive private schools, while others prohibit voucher-receiving schools from charging additional fees.

School choice policies usually aim to meet goals related to freedom of choice, school improvement, and equity. Although countries institute school choice policies for different reasons, these reasons typically include some combination of three main rationales. Firstly, school choice policies aim to give parents the freedom to determine the sort of schooling that best suits their children. Secondly, school choice policies seek to improve school quality through competitive market-based mechanisms. The underlying intuition is that popular schools receive higher enrolments and thus more funding, whereas unpopular schools will lose funding and eventually shut down. Hence, schools will compete to improve the quality of their offerings in order to attract more pupils. Thirdly, some school choice policies also aim to reduce socioeconomic disadvantages by giving poor families the opportunity to choose between schools—an

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[1] Pauline Musset, 'School Choice and Equity: Current Policies in OECD Countries and a Literature Review', OECD Education Working Papers No. 66, 31 January 2012, https://doi.org/10.1787/5k9fq23507vc-en.

opportunity that would otherwise be restricted to families who can afford to enrol in private schools.[2]

There is little consensus among researchers about whether school choice policies are beneficial or detrimental. For example, a recent review of 56 studies of Chile's nationwide school voucher programme—one of the most extensive school choice programmes in the world—found that the voucher programme had increased socioeconomic segregation in school enrolments and shifted school leaders' focus away from the development of teachers' skills and towards status-oriented competition.[3] However, a separate study found that a relatively recent modification to Chile's school voucher programme, which provides additional funding for children in the poorest 40% of the population, improved the test scores of these children and somewhat narrowed the gap between them and their more privileged peers.[4]

Some evidence suggests that school choice policies can widen educational gaps between socioeconomically privileged and underprivileged children. Numerous studies have shown that, in systems that offer school choice, children from more affluent families are more likely than their counterparts to attend schools beyond their neighbourhoods.[5] One key reason why school choice can increase inequity is that socioeconomically underprivileged families may lack the resources to take full advantage of the school choice system. These resources may be logistical, such as the ability to provide transport to a further away but more desirable school. However, decision-making resources are also crucial: underprivileged families may not have access to social networks or publications with adequate information about schools, or they may lack the time to invest in thoroughly investigating the schools available to them. Some studies have found that parents' approaches to finding information about schools vary according to their socioeconomic backgrounds.[6]

However, campaigns to provide information on school choice to underprivileged families have seen some success in improving educational access. A randomised-control trial of an intervention in Chile—in which parents watched a video about the long-term benefits of attending a good school, received information about local schools, and were given the opportunity to ask questions about the school choice process—found that families who received the intervention were

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[2] Ibid. See also Stephen Gibbons, Stephen Machin and Olmo Silva, 'The Educational Impact of Parental Choice and School Competition' (CentrePiece Winter 2016/7), https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/216368.pdf.

[3] Ernesto Treviño, Rick Mintrop, Cristóbal Villalobos, and Miguel Órdenes, 'What Might Happen If School Vouchers and Privatization of Schools Were to Become Universal in the U.S.: Learning from a National Test Case—Chile' (National Education Policy Center, policy brief, June 2018).

[4] Christopher Nielson, 'Targeted Vouchers, Competition Among Schools, and the Academic Achievement of Poor Students' (working paper, November 2013).

[5] As summarised in Pauline Musset, 'School Choice and Equity: Current Policies in OECD Countries and a Literature Review', OECD Education Working Papers No. 66, 31 January 2012.

[6] Sjoerd Karsten, Adrie Visscher, and Tim De Jong, 'Another Side to the Coin: The Unintended Effects of the Publication of School Performance Data in England and France', *Comparative Education* 37, no. 2 (2001): 231–42; Mark Schneider and Jack Buckley, 'What Do Parents Want From Schools? Evidence From the Internet', *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis* 24, no. 2 (2002): 133–44.

more likely to choose higher-performing schools, even if those schools were further from their homes. Four years after the intervention, students from these families had higher academic achievement than those who did not receive the intervention.[7] In India, private schools are legally required to offer 25% of their school places to low-income children for free, but many of these fee-free places are not taken up because families are not aware of them. To address this, a Delhi-based social enterprise called Indus Action launched a public campaign (including street plays, TV advertisements, a toll-free hotline, and assistance with filling in application forms, among many other elements) to provide families with information about these fee-free places. Over the last three years, Indus Action has facilitated the school enrolment of 30,000 children.[8]

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[7] Claudia Allende, Francisco Gallego and Christopher Neilson, 'The Equilibrium Effects of Informed School Choice' (mimeo, working paper, 2018).
[8] http://www.indusaction.org/projects.

3. What do we know about parental preference of schools in England?

- In choosing school preferences, parents in England may face trade-offs between different desirable school characteristics.
- The benefits of the parental preference system are unevenly distributed, whether by socioeconomic class or by geography.
- Policy options for local authorities include improving the overall quality of schools in the area and supporting undersubscribed schools.

Since the 1980s, England has used a choice-based system for school admissions, in which parents have the right to express a preference for the school which they would like their child to attend.[9] To form the basis of this decision, parents can access information about schools through various channels: visiting the school, checking the school's website, Ofsted reports, school league tables, and talking to other parents who have children at the school. It is mandatory for schools to publish on their website a variety of factors including: the amount of per-pupil money that they receive to support underprivileged children (known as the Pupil Premium), admissions criteria for the school, and disability policy.[10] When applying for a place, parents must provide a ranking of their preferred choice of schools on a form that is submitted as part of a centralised system to their local authority (LA). On the form, parents must supply 3 to 6 choices depending on the geographic area in which they are situated. Children are allocated school placements on the basis of both parental choice and the availability of the schools selected.[11] When a school is oversubscribed, they must give priority to those who are in care. Other oversubscription criteria, such as proximity to the school or attendance of a sibling at a school, are set by the school or the local authority.[12]

What do parents look for in a school?

In deciding on their school preferences, parents must choose between variables such as academic excellence, geographic proximity, suitability for the child, and likelihood of securing a place. High-performing schools are popular for their

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[9] See the Education Act 1980 and the Education Reform Act 1988.
[10] https://www.gov.uk/schools-admissions/admissions-criteria.
[11] Simon Burgess, Ellen Greaves, and Anna Vignoles, 'Understanding Parental choices of Secondary School in England Using National Administrative Data' (University of Bristol, October 2017).
[12] https://www.gov.uk/schools-admissions/admissions-criteria.

academic achievements, and therefore more likely to be oversubscribed.[13] However, the Ofsted Annual Parent Survey 2017 found that the most important factors in making a decision about a school (or childcare provider or college) were proximity to the parents' home and the Ofsted rating.[14] A different survey of parents by the National Foundation for Education Research (NFER) found that local factors were the most important: 'a school that suits my child' and 'location' of the school were identified as important by over half of respondents.[15] Once children are enrolled in school, however, this may change. One study found that parents' views on the quality of the school their child is currently attending are strongly related to the school's performance on tests— even though this measure of school performance was not related to pupil happiness of wellbeing in school.[16] All of this suggests that parents face many trade-offs in choosing schools for their children.

National data on school admissions suggests that some parents prioritise factors other than school quality. In an analysis of 2016-17 school admissions applications, the Education Policy Institute found that one-sixth of parents nominated a first-preference school that had been judged as less than Good by Ofsted. Strikingly, over a quarter of these parents lived nearer to a school rated Good or Outstanding than to the less-than-good school they nominated.[17] This is likely informed by a combination of reasons: some parents may prioritise school characteristics that are not reflected in Ofsted ratings, while some may make strategic decisions based on the likelihood of admission, and others simply may not have adequate information about school quality.

In what ways does the parental preference system affect inequality?[18]

Although the parental preference system has the potential to boost pupil achievement, it may also increase socioeconomic inequality via the housing market. For example, when a recent survey asked parents whether they knew someone who had moved house in order to access a catchment area with good schools, parents from a higher socioeconomic group were far more likely to answer

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[13] Simon Burgess, Ellen Greaves, and Anna Vignoles, 'Understanding Parental Choices of Secondary School in England Using National Administrative Data' (University of Bristol, October 2017).

[14] Ofsted, 'Annual parents survey 2017: parents' awareness and perceptions of Ofsted (2018), https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/698 913/Ofsted_Annual_Parents_Survey_2017.pdf.

[15] Karen Wespieser, Ben Durbin, and David Sims, 'School Choice: The Parent View' (NFER, 2015).

[16] Stephen Gibbons, Olmo Siva, School Quality, Child Wellbeing and Parents Satisfaction (*Economics of Education Review* 30 (2011): p. 312–331.

[17] Emily Hunt, 'Secondary School Choice in England' (Education Policy Institute, September 2018).

[18] For good overview of social stratification and the parental preference system in England, see the literature review (p. 11-28) in Rebecca Allen, Simon Burgess, And Leigh McKenna, 'School performance and parental choice of school: secondary data analysis' (Department for Education, research report, 2014), https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/school-performance-and-parental-choice-of-school.

affirmatively.[19] (This is illustrated by the emergence of tools such as Locrating, a web application which assists fee-paying users in understanding what school catchment areas a property lies in.[20]) A DfE study found that house prices near the highest-performing schools are higher than those in the surrounding areas for both primary and secondary schools. Specifically, for primary schools performing in the top 10%, nearby house prices are 8% higher than in the surrounding areas. For non-selective secondary schools, house prices are 6.8% higher.[21] Therefore, parents who cannot afford the higher prices may not be able to access catchment areas with better schools.[22] Another analysis has shown that households which do and do not qualify for free school meals (FSM) state a similar number of school preferences—but the better-resourced households that do not qualify can access better schools because of their proximity to higher-performing schools.[23]

Parents with different levels of socioeconomic resources may prioritise different factors in school preferences. The Education Policy Institute analysis of 2016-17 school admissions data found that Pupil Premium-eligible families were far more likely than others to name a less-than-Good school as their first preference despite living nearer to a Good or Outstanding school.[24] In the NFER survey, there was a difference in priorities between lower-income household (<£25,000) which prioritised location, high-quality of teachers, and community links, and higher-income households (>£50,000), which prioritised discipline, exam results, and the effectiveness of the school's senior leadership team.[25] This suggests that home-to-school transport is more likely to have an important role in the decisions of parents with fewer socioeconomic resources.

The manner in which parents access information on schools may also differ between socioeconomic groups. A report from The Sutton Trust, released in September 2018, found that when choosing a school, parents of a higher socioeconomic status are more likely to attend open days, read Ofsted reports, speak to parents at the school, read league tables and consult web resources.[26] These data supports previous studies which have similar findings on the way in which parents

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[19] Rebecca Montacute and Carl Cullinane, 'Parent Power 2018: How parents use financial and cultural resources to boost their children's chances of success' (The Sutton Trust, September 2018), https://www.suttontrust.com/research-paper/parent-power-2018-schools/.

[20] See https://www.locrating.com/.

[21] Department for Education, 'House prices and Schools: Do Houses Close to the Best-Performing Schools Cost More?' (ad hoc research note, March 2017).

[22] That said, an analysis that tracked a cohort of pupils in England found that house moves during this cohort's primary school years were only weakly related to school quality in the family's original neighbourhood, and only led to slight increases in social segregation. Rebecca Allen, Simon Burgess, and Tomas Key, 'Choosing secondary schools by moving house: school quality and the formation of neighbourhoods' (CMPO working paper No. 10/238, 2010).

[23] Simon Burgess, Ellen Greaves, and Anna Vignoles, 'Understanding Parental Choices of Secondary School in England Using National Administrative Data' (University of Bristol, October 2017).

[24] Emily Hunt, 'Secondary School Choice in England' (Education Policy Institute, September 2018).

[25] Karen Wespieser, Ben Durbin, and David Sims, 'School Choice: The Parent View' (NFER, 2015).

[26] Carl Cullinane and Rebecca Montacute, 'Parent Power 2018' (The Sutton Trust, September 2018).

make their decision, as parents of higher social status read more brochures and attended more talks about schools.[27]

Additionally, there is clear geographic variation in how much school choice a family can access. One indication of this variation is the fact that nearly three-quarters of all parents apply for fewer school preferences than the maximum allowed by their local authority. Nationally, one-third of parents nominated only one preferred school in 2016.[28] This disinclination to take full advantage of the parental preference system is doubtless informed by a wide range of reasons. However, it is telling that there are large differences between different local authorities: while fewer than 7% of parents in the Inner London authority of Lambeth state only one preference, this proportion exceeds 75% among parents in Northumberland and in Central Bedfordshire. Conversely, while over 98% of parents in Northumberland and Central Bedfordshire are offered their first preference, only 58% of Lambeth parents fall into this category.[29] A similar pattern was found in an analysis of 2010 school admissions data, as shown in Figure 1. All this evidence demonstrates that a child's home address can affect the quality of schools they can attend. According to a 2016 briefing published by the Social Market Foundation (SMF), the geographic area a child comes from has become a more powerful predictive factor of educational performance for those born in 2000 compared to those born in 1970.[30]

Figure 1. Percentage of pupils getting their first-choice schools for September 2010 entry, by local authority
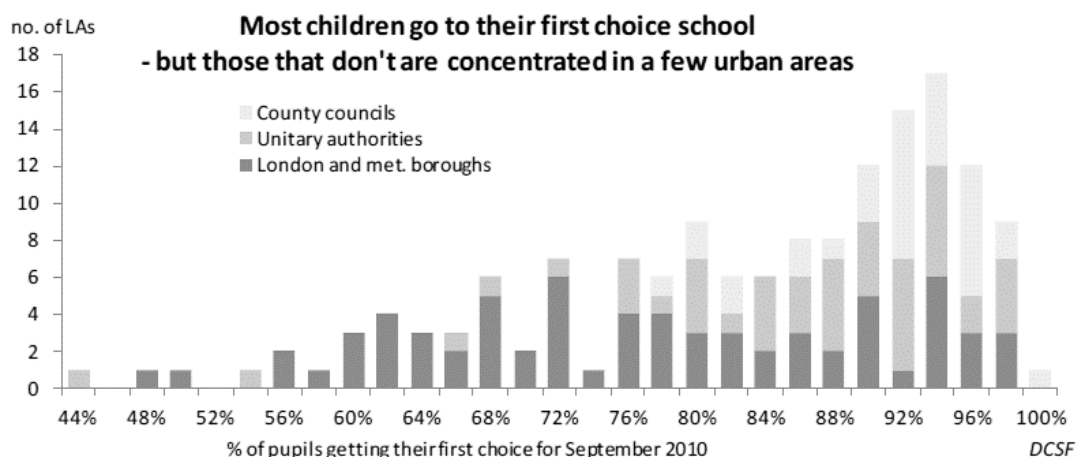
Source: Christine Gillie, 'Parental Choice in Secondary Education' (Key Issues for the New Parliament, House of Commons Library Research, 2010).

Strategic behaviour by school leaders to improve their schools' popularity may also contribute to inequity. A recent large-scale study (which included case studies of 47 schools, a survey of almost 700 school leaders, and an analysis of Ofsted ratings

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[27] Barry William Bastow, *A Study of Factors Affecting Parental Choice of Secondary School* (UCL Institute of Education, PhD thesis, 1991).
[28] Emily Hunt, 'Secondary School Choice in England' (Education Policy Institute, September 2018).
[29] Ibid.
[30] Social Market Foundation, 'Education Inequalities in England and Wales – Commission on Inequality in Education' (2016).

nationwide) found that the majority of school leaders felt pressure to compete for status, students, and/or staff. While the most common strategy for improving school status was trying to improve the school's Ofsted rating, some schools also pursued marketing campaigns designed to recruit pupils who were likely to perform well. The study also found that, on average, schools that maintained or improved their Ofsted rating to Outstanding between 2010 and 2015 experienced a decrease in the proportion of FSM-eligible pupils enrolled in the school; whereas schools that maintained or worsened their Ofsted rating to Requires Improvement or Inadequate experienced an increase in the proportion of FSM-eligible pupils.[31]

How are local authorities addressing these inequalities?

Some local authorities have focused on improving school standards throughout their areas. Such area-wide improvements can raise the overall quality of school choices available to parents when applying for admissions. The Local Government Association published a series of case studies which looked at how councils can effect change to ensure that all schools are good schools. One such case study is the Peterborough City Council, which spent £210 million pounds in 2010–2015 on rebuilding and refurbishing every secondary school in the city. Additionally, the council actively works with headteachers to build school-to-school partnerships for improvement. In 2014, Ofsted reported that the council's efforts were 'bearing positive results'.[32]

Some councils have implemented strategies to mitigate the financial challenges faced by undersubscribed schools. Such financial challenges can contribute to inequality between schools by affecting the quality of teaching, which may further reduce enrolment. The local education authority can choose to establish a falling rolls fund to support schools that are rated as Good or Outstanding by Ofsted but face a falling number of pupils, where local planning data show that the surplus places will be needed in the near future. [33] This possibility was recently raised at the Cambridgeshire Schools Forum. However, only one school would qualify for the falling rolls fund under the criteria given by the DfE, and it was decided that there was insufficient support for such a fund.[34]

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[31] Toby Greany and Rob Higham, *Hierarchy, Markets and Networks: Analysing the 'self-improving school-led system' agenda in England and the implications for schools* (UCL IOE Press, 2018). Free PDF available at https://www.ucl-ioe-press.com/books/education-policy/hierarchy-markets-and-networks/.

[32] Local Government Association, 'Making Sure Every Child has a Place at a Good School. Investing in our Nation's Future. The first 100 days of the next government' (2015).

[33] Education Funding Agency, 'Schools revenue funding 2016 to 2017: Criteria for allocating the growth fund, falling rolls fund and targeted high needs funding' (2015).

[34] Martin Wade, 'Agenda Item No. 8: Growth Fund and Falling Rolls Criteria 2018/19' (Cambridgeshire Schools Forum, 2017).

4. What do we know about parental preference of schools and its impact in Cambridgeshire?

To investigate parental preference of schools and its impact in Cambridgeshire, we looked at four different sources of empirical data, ranging from countywide statistics to one-to-one interviews. Our analyses are described below, starting with (i) bird's-eye-view statistics on 12,745 first-round applications for school admission in September 2018 entry, and then progressively zooming in through (ii) a survey of 282 Cambridgeshire parents, (iii) summary descriptions of 34 school admissions appeals heard in the summer of 2018, and (iv) first-hand perspectives from key personnel of one oversubscribed school and one undersubscribed school. Each data source gives a different perspective on our research question, *what factors influence parental preference of schools, and what are the outcomes of those preferences (and for whom)?*

It is important to note that, due to small sample sizes, most of our findings are only illustrative and might not accurately represent the county as a whole. The only exceptions to this are our first two (out of three) analyses of school admissions data, which encapsulate all first-round applications for admission to state-funded schools in Cambridgeshire in September 2018.

4.1 School admissions data and school characteristics

- There is a lot of variation in the popularity of different Cambridgeshire schools, and an uneven distribution of unfilled school places across districts and between schools.
- Among Cambridgeshire secondary schools, schools that are more popular also tend to have higher Ofsted ratings and lower proportions of pupils eligible for free school meals.

We analysed data from the first round of school admissions applications for September 2018 entry[35] to identify trends and relationships in Cambridgeshire school admissions. The data were provided by the County Council's Business Intelligence service. A key metric in the discussion that follows is each school's published admission number (PAN), i.e. the maximum number of pupils that can be enrolled in a particular year group at that school.

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[35] That is, our data concern applications and offers up to the National Offer Date, but exclude subsequent allocations such as appeals, re-allocations following declined offers, and the second round of offers for late applications.

Overall applications statistics

In 2017, there were an optimal number of places for secondary school pupils in Cambridgeshire, and a high proportion of families exercising their right to prefer non-catchment secondary schools. As shown in Table 1, the total number of places (i.e. the sum of the PAN) is 6405, which is 103 places (1.6%) greater than the number of incoming pupils in Cambridgeshire (i.e. 6302). This means that there were enough places for every pupil, with around 3 extra places per school. From the anticipated 6302 pupils, 5569 applications were received (88%). The others were, presumably, late to apply or out of the county. 2966 applications (53%) only stated one preferred school, which is higher than the national average for the previous year (33%).[36] Only 1807 applications (32%) named the catchment school as the first preference, and only 2032 applications (36%) named the catchments school among the preferences, which suggests that parents, in most cases, do try to take advantage of the school preference system.

Primary schools had a higher proportion of unfilled school places, which were distributed unevenly across the county. The total number of primary school places offered in Cambridgeshire was 8348, for a total of 7743 incoming pupils. This means that there were 605 (7.2%) more places then children expected. As with secondary schools, this works out to approximately 3 places per school. However, because of the smaller average size of primary schools, this level of unfilled places will have a more significant impact. This impact is concentrated in certain parts of the county: while Cambridge City had more incoming pupils (1544) than places available (1462), the other districts had excess capacity, notably in Huntingdonshire (2065 incoming pupils vs. 1548 available places). Another difference between the primary and secondary school applications is that a much higher percentage of primary pupils applied to their catchment schools.

Table 1. Summary of Cambridgeshire school admissions data for 2017

|		Total PAN	Incoming pupils	Total applications		Catchment is first preference		Applied to catchment		Applied to only one school	
Primary schools	**City**	1462	1544	1271	(82.3%)	495	(38.95%)	1079	(84.89%)	322	(25.33%)
	East	1260	1092	1042	(95.4%)	551	(52.88%)	723	(69.39%)	425	(40.79%)
	Fenland	1231	1198	1049	(87.6%)	613	(58.44%)	713	(67.97%)	589	(56.15%)
	Hunts	2548	2065	2206	(106.8%)	1465	(66.41%)	1862	(84.41%)	997	(45.19%)
	South	1847	1706	1608	(94.3%)	1129	(70.21%)	1514	(94.15%)	715	(44.47%)
	Total	8348	7605	7176	(94.4%)	4253	(59.27%)	5891	(82.09%)	3048	(42.47%)
Secondary schools		6405	6302	5569	(88.4%)	1807	(32.45%)	2032	(36.49%)	2966	(53.26%)

Notes: The total PAN is the sum of the Published Admission Numbers. The number of incoming pupils is based on NHS data for primary schools, and on the school census of feeder schools for secondary schools.

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[36] Emily Hunt, 'Secondary School Choice in England' (Education Policy Institute, September 2018).

Variation in popularity across Cambridgeshire schools

To understand how school popularity varies across the county, we classified schools into three categories: popular, medium, and unpopular. For a given school, we compared both (i) the number of applicants who chose the school as their first preference and (ii) the total number of applications received (whether first, second, or third preferences) to (iii) the number of incoming pupils who were associated with the school (for primary schools, this is based on NHS data on children living in the area; for secondary schools, this is based on Year 6 enrolments in feeder schools) . If a school had fewer total applicants than the number of incoming pupils, this meant that the number of pupils in the school's catchment who were applying to schools elsewhere was greater than the number of pupils from other catchment areas who were applying to the school in question. Such schools were classified as unpopular. In contrast, schools were classified as popular if the number of pupils choosing them as first preference was greater than the number of incoming pupils living in the catchment area—which indicated that even out-of-catchment parents were eager to enrol their children in the school. Finally, if the number of applicants listing the school as first preference was smaller than the number of incoming pupils, but the total number of applications to the school was greater than the number of incoming pupils, these schools were put in the medium category. For parents in the area, such schools may not be the most desirable choice, but were a good backup option. This categorisation is illustrated with hypothetical schools in Figure 2.

Figure 2. Number of first-preference and total applications received by hypothetical schools in each of the three popularity categories.
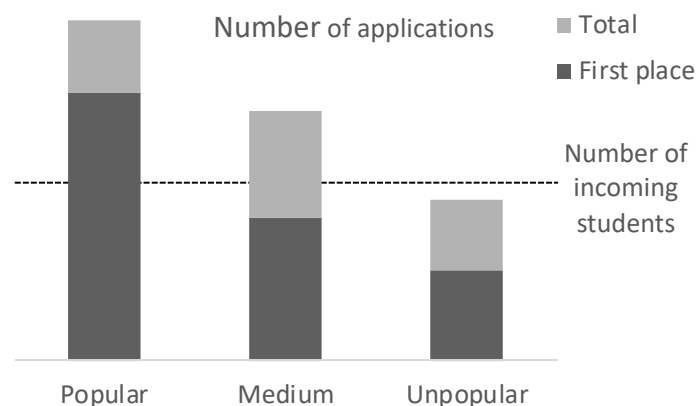
This classification does not always correspond with whether a school is under- or oversubscribed. The reason for this is that a school's PAN sometimes differs greatly from the number of incoming pupils living in catchment. For example, Sawtry Village Academy offered a PAN of 230 places, but only had 131 pupils finishing in its feeder primary schools. Even though it falls into the medium popularity category, more than 50% of its places remained unfilled after the first application round in 2017. One contrasting example is Newnham Croft Primary, which fell in the unpopular category despite having filled all its places in the first round. This is because the number of

incoming pupils in its catchment area is 71 (based on data from the NHS), but its PAN is only 34.

The number of schools in each popularity category is summarised in Table 2 below. For secondary schools it is the summary for the whole county while for primary schools a breakdown by regions is also included. The number of schools with unfilled capacity after the first admissions round is greater than the number of unpopular schools, which indicates that many schools of medium popularity were not filled up. However, looking at the limited data we had on applications for September 2017 entry, alongside school headcounts in October 2017, it seems the most of medium-popularity schools in that year had effectively filled up in the second admissions round, such that only a few in this category started the year undersubscribed. This shows that our categories capture the schools' popularity well.

Table 1. The number of schools by (a) popularity categories, and (b) whether or not all available places were filled in the first admission round

		Popular	Medium	Unpopular	Filled	Unfilled
Primary schools	City	10	14	5	15	14
	East	20	8	3	17	14
	Fenlands	25	14	3	24	12
	Hunts	30	17	8	33	12
	South	27	22	3	30	22
	Total	112	75	22	119	74
Secondary schools		17	8	6	19	13

In each part of the county, except for Cambridge city, more than half of all primary schools are in the popular category. The number of medium-popularity schools is also considerably higher than the number of unpopular schools. This suggests that most Cambridgeshire schools usually manage to fill up their places after the second admission round.

The relatively low number of unpopular schools means that most unfilled places were concentrated in a handful of schools. The number of unpopular primary schools is ranged from 3 to 5 in every district except Huntingdonshire, which had 8 unpopular primary schools (18% of all Huntingdonshire primary schools). Unpopular schools also seem to be concentrated around market towns such as Ramsey and St. Neots. Apart from these, popular and unpopular schools are quite evenly distributed across Cambridgeshire.

Regression analysis of school admissions and school characteristics

The aim of this analysis was to investigate whether a school's popularity is linked to its quality and to the socioeconomic background of its pupils. For this analysis, we used the percentage of unfilled places as an indicator of popularity: the

lower the percentage of unfilled places, the more popular the school is. The number of unfilled places is the difference between the number of allocated places and the PAN. Schools that over-admit, i.e. admit more pupils than their PAN, thus have a negative number of unfilled places. We decided to use this quantity instead of the popularity categories described above because the percentage of unfilled places allows us to distinguish between schools that only have a few unfilled places from the ones that are significantly undersubscribed.

We used the schools' overall Ofsted ratings as a proxy for school quality,[37] and the percentage of pupils eligible for free school meals (FSM) as a proxy for socioeconomic status. Ofsted ratings were obtained from the official webpage.[38] FSM data were obtained from the DfE's Get Information About Schools register.[39] These datasets were then matched to the 2018 admissions application dataset. Multivariable regression analysis was performed on the data to see if there was any correlation between school performance, socio-economic composition and the popularity. (As a side calculation, we also looked at the correlation between Ofsted rating and FSM eligibility, and found that there was no statistically significant correlation between the two quantities. Therefore, the socioeconomic composition of the schools in our sample are not related to their quality.)

It is very important to note that this analysis can only investigate correlation, not causation. In other words, our model cannot identify whether Ofsted ratings affect schools' popularity, or vice versa. Moreover, our analysis is limited by a small sample size. For example, only 26 secondary schools were included in the analysis because the other schools were missing Ofsted and/or FSM data. Another limitation of the dataset was that 17 schools were rated 'Good' by Ofsted, and therefore the data was not well-spread.

For primary schools, the analysis did not find any significant correlation between school quality, socioeconomic composition, and popularity. This is means that Ofsted rating and the background of pupils is not significantly related to parents' preferences of schools. The lack of correlation may be partly due to the fact that parents are likely to prefer the primary school closest to their home. (In Cambridgeshire school admissions for September 2018 entry, primary school applications were two times more likely than secondary school applications to name the catchment school as first preference.)

However, there was a significant relationship between these variables for secondary schools. The best-fitting linear relation between the variables is:

$$\% \text{ of unfilled places} = 1.3 * \% \text{ of free school meals} + 7.9 * \text{Ofsted rating} - 19$$

This means that any given school is expected to have, on average, about 8% fewer unfilled places than a similar school that was rated one level lower by Ofsted. Also, a school is expected to have, on average, 13% fewer unfilled places than a similar

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[37] It may be interesting, in subsequent analyses, to investigate correlation between the school popularity and different components of the Ofsted rating (e.g leadership and management, quality of teaching, etc).

[38] https://reports.beta.ofsted.gov.uk

[39] www.get-information-about-schools.service.gov.uk/

school in which 10% more pupils are FSM-eligible. Figures 3 and 4 visualise these relationships.

Figure 3. The percentage of unfilled places as a function of % of pupils eligible for free school meals (N=26 Cambridgeshire secondary schools)
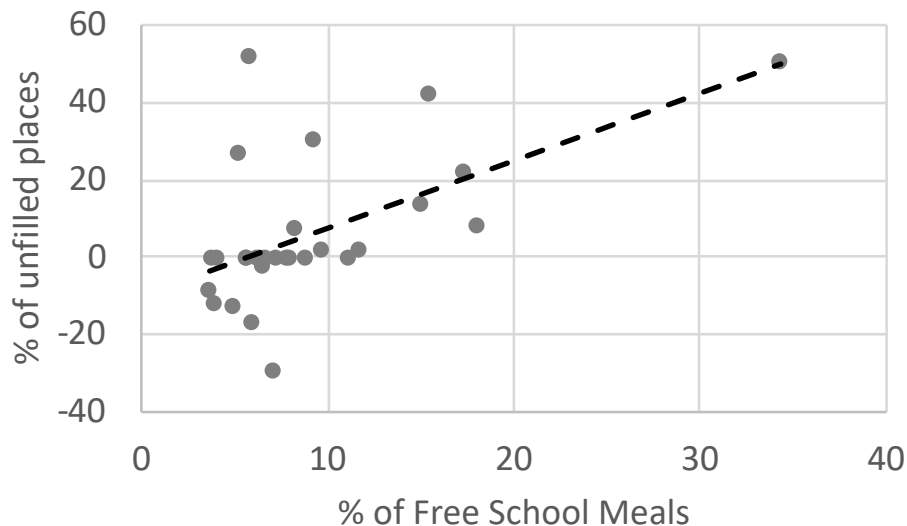
The data suggest that schools with a higher proportion of free school meal-eligible pupils have more unfilled places, although the correlation is not very strong as the data is very scattered.

Figure 4. The percentage of unfilled places as a function of Ofsted rating (N=26 Cambridgeshire secondary schools)
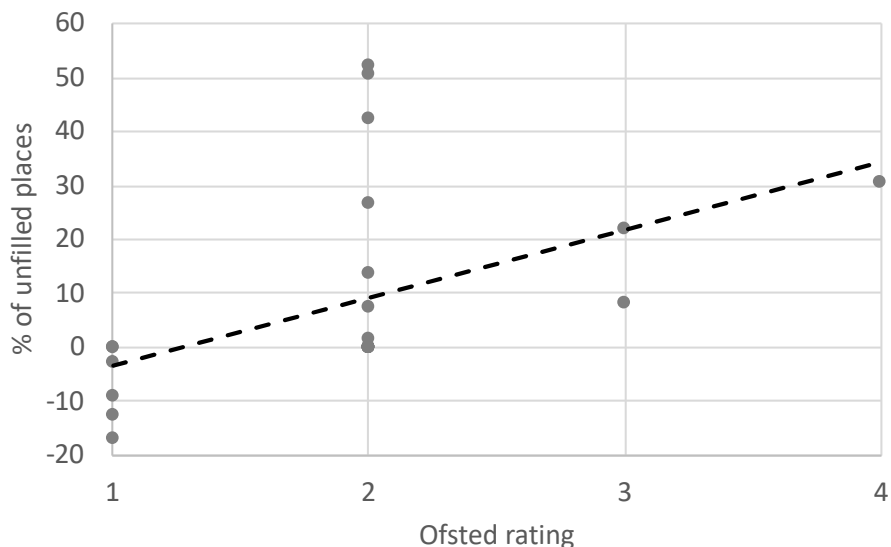
Ofsted ratings are coded as follows: 1 – Outstanding, 2 – Good, 3 – Improvement Required, 4 – Inadequate.

Most Outstanding school over-admit, whereas the schools below a 'Good' rating are undersubscribed. There is an observable trend but there is some significant scattering of the data points as well.

School quality and socioeconomic composition account for 40% of the variation in secondary school popularity in Cambridgeshire. The R^2 value for this model is 0.42, which means that the Ofsted rating and FSM eligibility together can explain about 40% of the variation in popularity between schools. The other 60% is determined by other factors that we did not include in our analysis. However, it is worth mentioning that the p-value for the F-test of this regression model was 0.2%, which means that it is extremely unlikely that the tendencies that we observed are only due to random noise and not actual correlations. That said, it is important to remember that this analysis is not able to tell us anything about causality.

4.2 Survey of parents

- When choosing between schools, parents whose children are eligible for free school meals consult fewer sources of information than their counterparts, with particularly large gaps for the sources that most parents regarded as the most useful (i.e. school open days and Ofsted information).

- Some parents feel that they have no meaningful choice of schools, whether due to oversubscription or long distances to desirable schools; while others expressed concerns about equity, including families who use relatives' addresses or temporarily rent in-catchment houses while applying.

We conducted an online survey to gauge Cambridgeshire parents' experiences and opinions of school admissions. The survey, which ran from 25 June 2018 to 25 July 2018, was publicised to local parents through a variety of County Council channels: a news piece on the County Council website,[40] a banner on the County Council's webpages about schools, and a targeted Facebook advertisement campaign.[41] The survey questionnaire is available in Appendix 6.1. In total, the survey received 366 responses, of which 282 were complete. The following analysis focuses on the 282 complete responses.

Survey respondents spanned all county districts and a range of socioeconomic and linguistic backgrounds, comparable to county-level demographics. As shown in Table 3, all five divisions of Cambridgeshire were represented in the survey. Fenland was somewhat underrepresented, with 18 respondents (6.4% of all respondents, compared to 16.1% of county residents); while Cambridge City was somewhat overrepresented, with 68 respondents (24.1% of all respondents, compared to 19.0% of county residents). This may be due in part to Cambridge residents having access to relatively more schools in close proximity—and, by extension, greater

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[40] https://www.cambridgeshire.gov.uk/news/have-your-say-on-cambridgeshire-school-admissions/
[41] This campaign ran from 28 June to 12 July, and generated 346 link clicks costing £0.23 per click.

interest in parental preference of schools—compared to Fenland, with its lower geographic concentration of schools. The survey had good representation from parents whose children are eligible for free school meals, with 49 respondents;[42] but less representation of parents whose first language was not English, with 22 respondents.[43]

Table 3. Demographics of parent survey respondents, compared to county[44]

Total number of respondents=282	Number of respondents	Survey %	County %
Which county division do you live in?			
Cambridge City	68	**24.1**	**19.0**
East Cambridgeshire	40	**14.2**	**13.7**
Fenland	18	**6.4**	**16.1**
Huntingdonshire	84	**29.8**	**27.4**
South Cambridgeshire	72	**25.5**	**23.9**
Are your children eligible for free school meals?			
Yes	49	**17.4**	**9.0**
Is English your first language?			
No	22	**7.8**	**13.7**

The large majority of survey respondents stated that their children were attending one of their preferred schools. One section of the survey asked respondents to describe the school enrolment of each of their currently school-going children. Respondents reported having currently between 0 and 4 school-going children.[45] As shown in Table 4, over 80% of survey respondents' children were

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[42] We chose to ask parents about eligibility for free school meals rather than Pupil Premium because the latter is a broader and more complex measure that fewer parents may be aware of.

[43] One potential source of bias is that the survey was conducted solely via the internet. However, the proportion of survey respondents who said that they referred to the County Council's admissions guidance on paper, i.e. 5.3% (15 respondents), is comparable to the proportion of parents who submitted paper applications for 2018 entry, i.e. 6.2% for primary school and 5.5% for secondary school (as cited in the 'First Steps' and 'Next Steps' booklets).

[44] (a) County-level data on population by district are mid-2015 estimates, obtained from https://cambridgeshireinsight.org.uk/population/population-estimates/. (b) County-level data on FSM eligibility apply to the pupil-level (not parent-level) and are from January 2018, obtained from the Department for Education, 'Schools, pupils and their characteristics: January 2018', Tables 8a and 8b, https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/schools-pupils-and-their-characteristics-january-2018. (c) County-level data English as an additional language on apply to the pupil-level (not parent-level) and are from January 2018, obtained from the Department for Education, 'Schools, pupils and their characteristics: January 2018', Tables 10a and 10b, https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/schools-pupils-and-their-characteristics-january-2018.

[45] It is possible that some of the 37 respondents who stated that they did not have any currently school-going children should not rightly be included in the respondents sample. However, based on these 37 respondents' answers, it was clear that at least some of them had used the school admissions system either because they either (a) had children who have completed their schooling,

attending the school most preferred by their parents, and over 90% were attending one of their top three preferences.

That said, it is important to note that these 'official' preferences may not fully reflect parental preferences, due to mismatches between available schools and what parents regard as desirable schools. This dissatisfaction with school choice was a prominent theme in the free-text portion of the survey, which will be discussed below. It is equally important to note that survey respondents' children were somewhat less likely to be enrolled in preferred schools than the county average, perhaps reflecting the general tendency for people to provide feedback when disgruntled rather than when satisfied. However, these deviations from the county average were not large, so it is unlikely that the survey respondents' perceptions of school admissions differ considerably from most Cambridgeshire parents.

Table 4. Schools attended by children of survey respondents, by parental preference and level of education, compared to county[46]

	Number of children	Survey %	County %
Primary school children			
1st preference	273	**85.8**	**94.7**
1st, 2nd, or 3rd preference	298	**93.7**	**99.0**
Total number of primary school children	*318*		
Secondary school children			
1st preference	73	**80.2**	**87.9**
1st, 2nd, or 3rd preference	83	**91.2**	**96.2**
Total number of secondary school children	*91*		

In the following analysis, we focus on similarities and differences between parents whose children are eligible for free school meals (FSM), and those who are not.[47] Based on our conversations with Councillors and County Council senior officers, as well as the preceding discussion on parental preference in school admissions in England, we believe that it is important to investigate the extent to which

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(b) had children who were about to start schooling in the 2018–19 year, or (c) had attempted to enrol their children in LA-maintained schools but did not proceed with the enrolment due to dissatisfaction with their allocated schools. Consequently, we included these 37 respondents in the analysis because the drawbacks of potentially excluding respondents with legitimate experiences was greater than the risk of skewing our results with illegitimate respondents.

[46] County-level data on school admissions preferences for primary school children are based on admission offers in March and April 2018 and obtained from Cambridgeshire County Council, 'First Steps: Admission to Primary School 2019/2020'. For secondary school children, the data are based on admission offers in March 2018 and obtained from Cambridgeshire County Council, Next Steps: Admission to Secondary School 2019/2020.

[47] All charts that use the FSM/non-FSM distinction exclude the 16 respondents who stated that they don't know whether or not their children are eligible for free school meals.

Cambridgeshire families may differ in their capacities for taking full advantage of the school admissions system. Accordingly, we focus on FSM eligibility, as a proxy for socioeconomic deprivation.[48] While FSM eligibility emphasises family income levels rather than other measures of socioeconomic status,[49] our results are comparable to those of the Sutton Trust's 'Parent Power 2018' survey, which used parental occupation categories. [50] Unfortunately, our survey did not receive enough respondents to conduct sufficiently rigorous analyses of other categories that may be differentially affected by the parental preference system, such as rurality, English as an additional language, or special educational needs and disabilities (SEND).

What do Cambridgeshire parents look for in a school?

In choosing schools for their children, Cambridgeshire parents prioritise school leadership and the school climate. As shown in Figure 5, over 90% of Cambridgeshire parents identified 'an active and pleasant school climate' and 'committed and competent' school leaders as 'important' or 'very important' reasons for choosing a particular school for their children.[51] School leadership and school climate were also most frequently identified as one of the three most important reasons for choosing a school, as shown in Figure 6. Other highly valued aspects of school quality included a strong curriculum, high academic achievements of pupils in the school, and proximity of the school to the parent's home or workplace.

Overall, parents value school characteristics that meaningfully contribute to child development, rather than spurious, impression-based characteristics. Roughly similar percentages of parents identified academic achievements, school reputation, and school facilities and grounds as 'important' or 'very important' reasons. However, in listing their top three priorities, parents were much more likely to include academic achievements, which are a proxy (albeit an imperfect one) for the quality of teaching and learning; and much less likely to include school reputation or facilities and grounds, which have a more tenuous link to children's development (particularly in the case of facilities and grounds).

Parents who specified 'Other' reasons for school preferences gave reasons linked to other aspects of child development, such as socioemotional growth. Most frequently mentioned were schools with a nurturing ethos that provide good pastoral care and prioritise well-rounded (rather than narrowly academic) development. Others emphasised the need for good SEND support. A number of parents also had strong preferences for either faith-based or secular schools. Other

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[48] Sonia Ilie, Alex Sutherland, and Anna Vignoles, 'Revisiting Free School Meal Eligibility as a Proxy for Pupil Socio-Economic Deprivation', British Educational Research Journal 43, no. 2 (April 2017): 253–74, https://doi.org/10.1002/berj.3260.

[49] Criteria for FSM eligibility are available at https://www.gov.uk/apply-free-school-meals.

[50] Rebecca Montacute and Carl Cullinane, 'Parent Power 2018' (The Sutton Trust, September 2018).

[51] Every time this question was displayed to a respondent, the reasons were presented in a differently randomised order, so responses are not biased by the order in which reasons were presented.

factors mentioned included: small school or class sizes; strong policies on bullying and discipline; specific aspects of curriculum (e.g. music, or child-centred learning); the responsiveness of school leadership to parental input; cultural and linguistic inclusivity; links to the local community or to particular schools; and the availability of wraparound (i.e. before and after school) care.

Figure 5. Percent of respondents identifying a reason as 'important' or 'very important' in choosing a school, by FSM eligibility
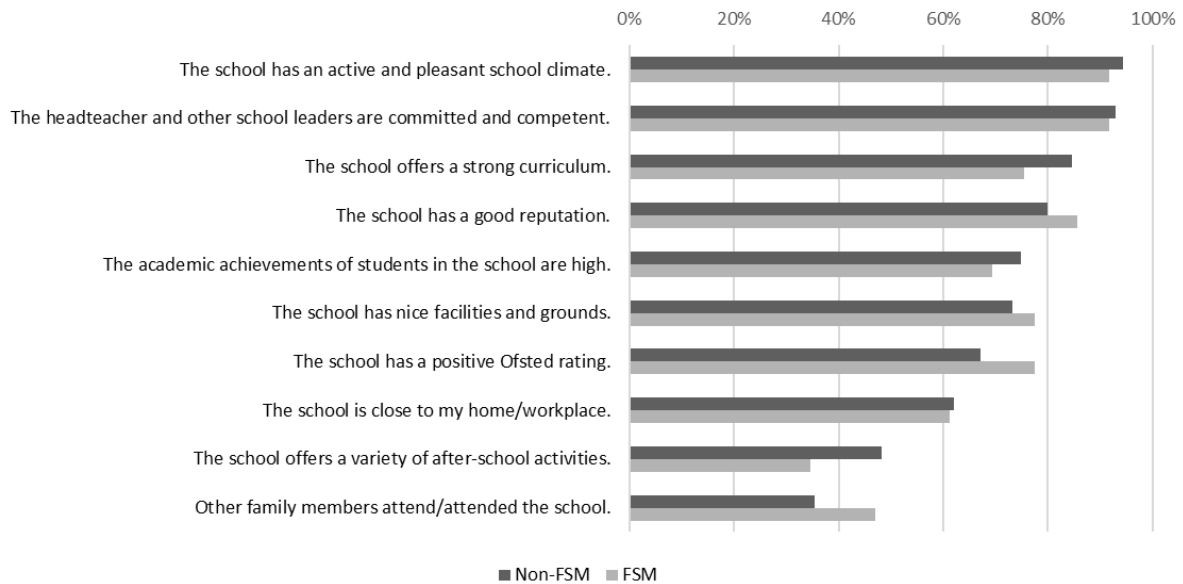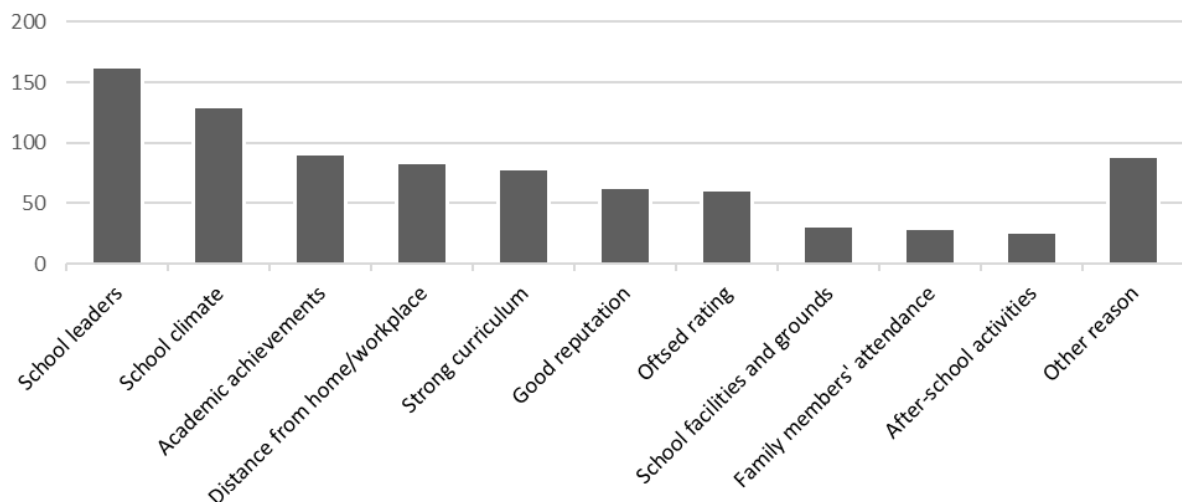

Figure 6. Number of respondents identifying a reason as one of the three most important for choosing a school
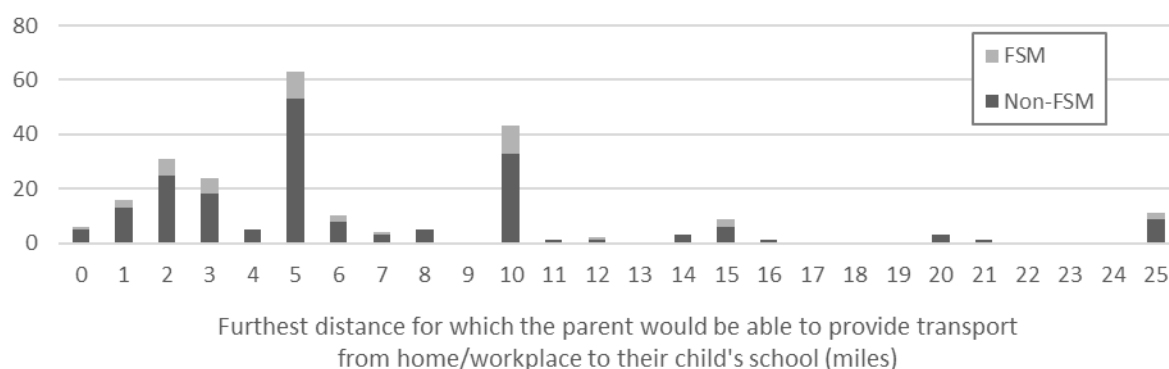

Cambridgeshire parents prioritise similar aspects of school quality, whether or not their children are eligible for FSM. Across the reasons for school preferences, the largest differences between FSM and non-FSM parents were in the two least-

prioritised factors, i.e. after-school activities and other family members attending/having attended the school. However, these differences are nontrivial because they do align with other studies of socioeconomic inequity. Better-resourced families are typically more able to participate in after-school enrichment activities that develop children's non-academic skills and interests (and facilitate their entry into university). Additionally, the greater value that FSM parents place on other family members' attendance at the school may point to either greater constraints in home-to-school transport or a greater likelihood to choose the most familiar school because of limited information.

Parents differ considerably in their capacities for providing transport to school from their homes or workplaces. As shown in Figure 7, there is a wide distribution of the further distance for which parents would be able to provide home-to-school transport. At the lowest end, 6 respondents answered '0 miles'; while 11 respondents gave the highest possible answer on our sliding scale, i.e. '25 miles'. Among our survey respondents, there were no clear differences in school transport for FSM and non-FSM parents. For both groups of parents, the average (mean) distance was 6.8 miles, and the most commonly identified (modal) distance was 5 miles. However, it is likely that, on the whole, Cambridgeshire families facing socioeconomic deprivation will face greater challenges in providing home-to-school transport. This is supported by the Sutton Trust's 'Parent Power 2018' survey, which had a larger sample size and a more fine-grained categorisation of socioeconomic status than our survey, and which found that working-class parents were more likely than their middle-class counterparts to consider the cost of travel or extra financial costs to be important reasons in their school preferences.[52]

Figure 7. Number of survey respondents by the furthest distance (in miles) for which they could provide transport to school from their home or workplace


Furthest distance for which the parent would be able to provide transport from home/workplace to their child's school (miles)

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[52] Rebecca Montacute and Carl Cullinane, 'Parent Power 2018' (The Sutton Trust, September 2018), p. 17.

What sources of information do Cambridgeshire parents refer to when choosing schools?

In making school choices, Cambridgeshire parents consult a wide variety of sources, with a preference for sources 'on the ground' (i.e. school open days, word of mouth, and school websites), as shown in Figure 8. This preference for visiting schools first-hand was reflected in free-text comments. Out of the 23 parents who specified 'other' information sources, 13 wrote that they made independent, non-open-day visits to schools of interest. Furthermore, in the general free-text comments at the end of the survey, four parents requested better publicity of school open days. Similarly, open days were, by far, the most frequently named as one of the three most helpful sources of information, as shown in Figure 9.

Figure 8. Percentage of respondents who referred to a source of information in deciding on school preferences, by FSM eligibility
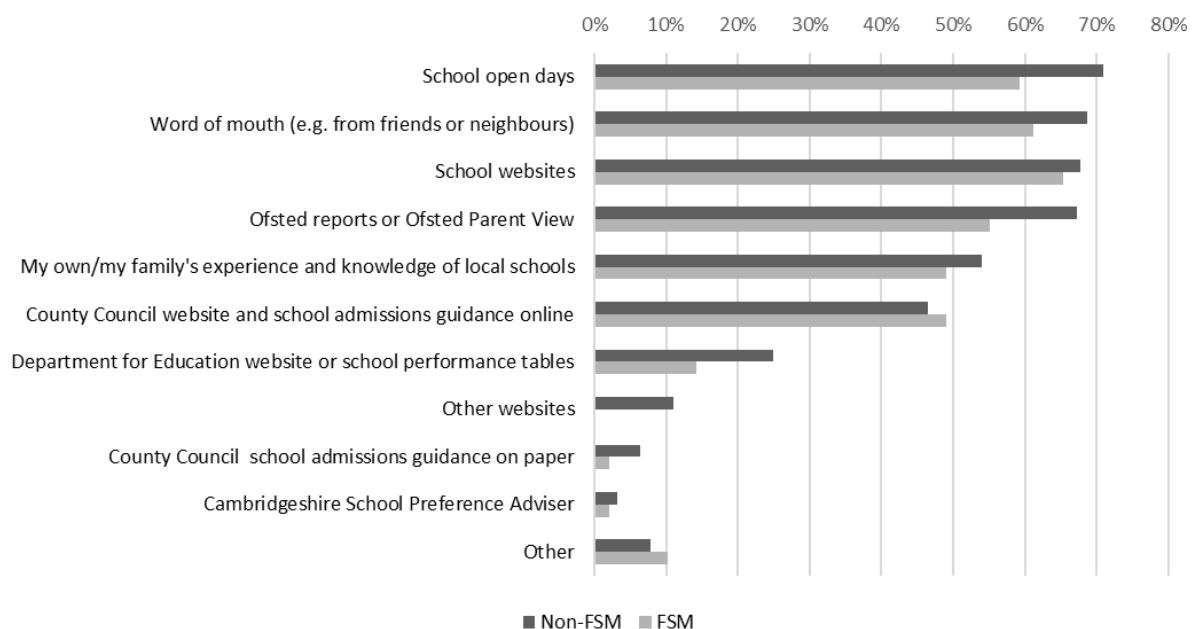
Parents of FSM-eligible children consult fewer sources of information in making school choices than parents of non-FSM children. On average, parents of FSM-eligible children referred to 3.7 sources of information (out of a total of ten sources listed in the questionnaire), as compared to 4.2 sources for parents of non-FSM children. While this is a relatively small difference, parents of FSM-eligible children were over-represented among those who only referred to one source of information, but under-represented among those who referred to 8 or more sources, as shown in Figure 10. Similarly, the Sutton Trust's 'Parent Power 2018' survey found that working-class parents were three times more likely than upper-middle-class parents to be 'limited choosers' (i.e. using 0 or 1 source of information to make school choices), and

four times less likely to be 'hyper choosers (i.e. using 5 or more sources of information).[53]

Figure 9. Number of respondents identifying a source of information as one of the three most useful sources in deciding on school preferences
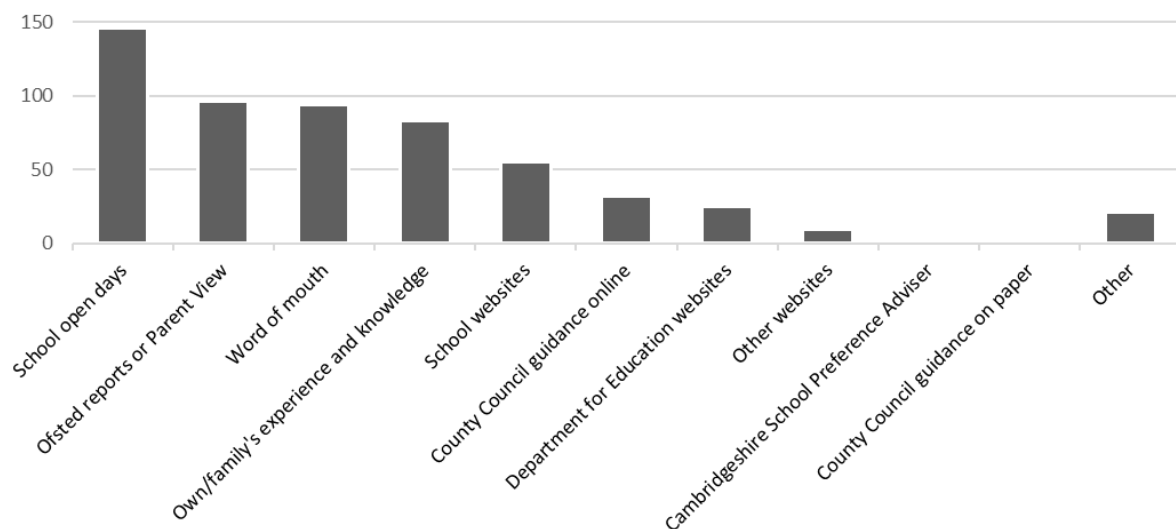
Figure 10. Number of respondents consulting different numbers of sources in deciding on school preferences, by FSM eligibility

Number of sources consulted in deciding on school preferences
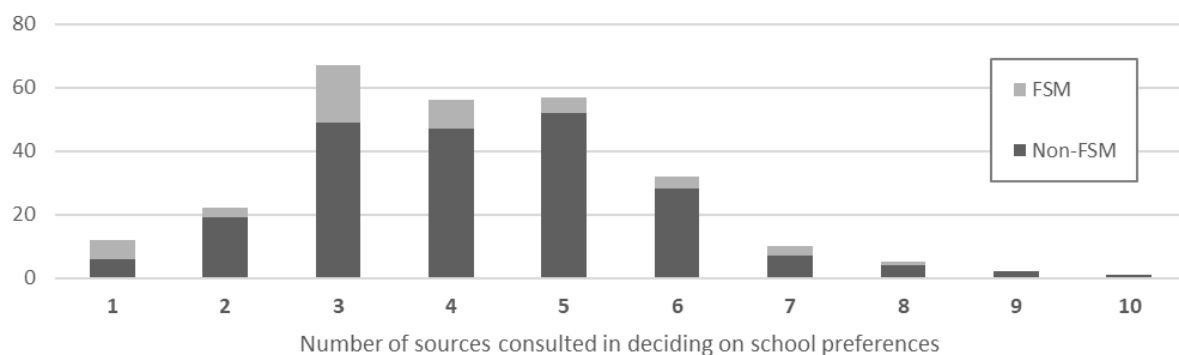
This information gap between FSM categories is particularly worrying for the information sources that parents regard as most useful. Although parents of FSM-eligible children were less likely to consult almost every source of information than parents of non-FSM children, it is troubling that the largest gaps (12 percentage points each) are for school open days and Ofsted reports/Parent View—i.e. the two sources that parents regard as the most useful.[54] It is also worth noting that none of the 12

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[53] Ibid, p. 14–16.

[54] There are comparably large gaps (11 percentage points each) between FSM and non-FSM usage of DfE websites/school performance tables and other websites (i.e. not run by schools, the Council, or other government offices).

survey respondents who reported making independent visits to prospective schools were parents of FSM-eligible children. While accessing the next two most useful sources—i.e. word of mouth and family experience—requires less time and travel costs than attending school open days, the information available via these sources is contingent on familial and social networks. As discussed in the literature review, higher-performing schools tend to be located in more expensive neighbourhoods, so more affluent families might have disproportionate access to first-hand accounts of better schools.

Other concerns: equity, information availability, and special circumstances

In free-text comments, approximately one-third of all survey respondents expressed frustration with various aspects of the school admissions system. Out of the 282 survey respondents, 105 left free-text comments on the final page of the survey, the majority of which conveyed disappointment and disillusionment with Cambridgeshire school admissions. These comments are available in Appendix 6.2. While recognising that any feedback forum is more likely to attract grievances than commendations, we believe it is worth paying attention to the concerns raised, especially those that were mentioned by multiple parents.

Numerous parents expressed the sentiment that the parental preference system does not provide them with any meaningful choice of schools. Common reasons for this included: a lack of alternatives to the catchment school; oversubscription in desirable schools (whether the catchment school, faith/secular schools, or higher-performing schools); or catchment boundaries that are perceived as arbitrary (for example, when other schools are located closer to the home than the catchment school). Consequently, many respondents stated that they do not feel they have any real choice of schools.

Some respondents raised issues related to equity, whether in terms of general access to good schooling or in terms of socioeconomic resources. Several respondents expressed hopes for uniformly high-quality schools, such that parental preferences would be redundant. (For example, 'If schools were properly funded to allow all schools to be good, we wouldn't need to have choices at all. Everyone should be able to go to their catchment school.') Others expressed concerns about inequities arising from differential capacities for providing transport to non-catchment schools or from differential house prices near high-performing schools. Relatedly, three parents said that they had moved house to be close to their preferred schools—a practice that is eminently justifiable for the family in question, but which may widen gaps in educational access between families.

Even more perturbing is the observation from two respondents that some Cambridgeshire parents engage in morally and legally questionable behaviour to appear in-catchment for desirable schools. One respondent described 'wealthy

parents renting in catchment of successful schools then moving once they have their places', while another mentioned that practice as well as parents 'giving grandparents' addresses to gain a preferred place'. While this concern was not raised frequently, we highlight it because of its gravity, and also because it could further widen educational access gaps. Nationally, the Sutton Trust's 'Parent Power 2018' survey found that 20% of upper-middle-class respondents personally knew someone who had bought or rented a second home in order to obtain preferential access to a particular school.[55] The occasional use of fraudulent addresses in school admissions is also acknowledged by the Cambridgeshire County Council in its admissions guidance materials.[56] While it is beyond the Council's capacities to physically verify the home addresses of every child applying for a place in school, the existence of such questionable, self-seeking practices lends additional weight to the argument for helping under-resourced families to navigate the school admissions system effectively.

School placements can be particularly challenging when children have SEND or when siblings are allocated to different schools. Several parents whose children have SEND expressed dissatisfaction about relatively few schools offering adequate SEND provision and about difficulty in finding information about SEND provision in schools. Some parents also described logistical challenges from siblings allocated to different schools, whether challenges in managing different schools' holiday schedules or complicated school runs. Three parents also expressed great frustration around after-school childcare, either because their child's allocated school did not provide wraparound care, or because the child was assigned to a school far away from their pre-existing childcare provider.

4.3 School appeals data

- There is a discrepancy between, on one hand, the local authority's priorities in school admissions and, on the other hand, what parents prioritise in schools and their capacities for providing home-to-school transport.

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[55] Rebecca Montacute and Carl Cullinane, 'Parent Power 2018' (The Sutton Trust, September 2018), p. 23–24.

[56] See, for example 'First Steps: Admission to primary school 2019/20', p. 18 (https://ccc-live.storage.googleapis.com/upload/www.cambridgeshire.gov.uk/residents/children-and-families/First%20Steps%202019-20%2014.09.18%20small.pdf?inline=true) or 'Next Steps: Admission to secondary school 2019/20', p. 20 (https://ccc-live.storage.googleapis.com/upload/www.cambridgeshire.gov.uk/residents/children-and-families/Next%20Steps%202019%20-%202020%2011.09.18.pdf?inline=true).

If a child is not allocated a place at the first preference school parents are legally entitled to lodge an appeal against the local authority's decision.[57] This right to appeal applies whether the child was allocated to the second or third preference schools, the catchment school, or the nearest school at which a place is available. The appeal is heard by a panel of three members who are independent of the County Council, at least one of whom is a lay person and at least one of whom has experience in education. Parents can appeal before the panel to present their cases, or the appeals can be heard in absentia.

We analysed summary data for 34 appeals that were heard for entry into Cambridgeshire schools in September 2018. These anonymised summaries were prepared by a solicitor at County Council legal services provider LGSS Law, with the aim of providing a broadly accurate representation of this round of appeals. The summary data—comprising the child's year group, the grounds for appeal (categorised), the appeals decision, and the reasons for the decision—can be found in Appendix 6.3. In most cases, the grounds for appeal fell into multiple categories (for example, medical issues as well as bullying).[58] The appeals summaries covered both primary and secondary school, with a concentration on Reception and Year 7, i.e. the typical years to seek admission to a new school. Out of the 34 appeals in the data summary, 6 had been successful. For comparison, as of 10 September 2018, the appeals panel had heard a total of 69 appeals for Reception (13 successful), 213 appeals for secondary school (103 successful), and 7 in-year appeals for entry into school year groups other than the school's typical year of entry (3 successful).

Successful appeals were typically upheld because of serious risks to the child's safety or wellbeing. This applied to 5 out of the 6 successful cases. (In the 6th case, the panel found that admitting an additional pupil would not cause any detriment to the school, so the appeal was upheld without considering the merits of the case.) In 4 out of the successful cases, either the child or the parent faced serious health issues. In 2 of the cases, there was a significant risk of violence to the child, not only from peer bullying, but from either domestic violence or from prior conflict between the child's parents and another family at the originally designated school.

The most commonly cited grounds for appeal were convenience and transport— but such appeals were unlikely to be successful. Based on the summarised data,

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[57] For national statutory guidance on school admission appeals, see the School Admissions Code (https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/school-admissions-code--2) and the School Admission Appeals Code (https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/school-admissions-appeals-code). For Cambridgeshire guidance on school admission appeals, see https://www.cambridgeshire.gov.uk/residents/children-and-families/schools-&-learning/apply-for-a-school-place/admission-appeals/.

[58] The categories were: Transport, Convenience, Academic, Medical: Parent, Medical: Child, Medical: Sibling, Subject specialism, Social care, Bullying, Friendship group, Fleeing domestic violence, Sibling, Marriage Breakdown, and Religious ethos. 'Medical' included diagnosed health conditions and learning disabilities, as well as undiagnosed conditions such as depression or anxiety. 'Social' included circumstances where a family had moved to social housing, as well as preference for a school on cultural or ethnic reasons (e.g. a school's emphasis on outdoor learning, or its high concentration of students from a particular ethnolinguistic background).

parents and the appeals panel appeared to have different expectations for what constitutes an unreasonable home-to-school distance or an unusually complicated school run. (The only successful appeal that cited either convenience or transport was the 6th successful case mentioned in the previous paragraph, which was upheld irrespective of its merits.)

Appeals on the grounds of the suitability of the preferred school for child were also unlikely to be successful. None of the appeals that were lodged on the basis of academic offerings, friend group or sibling attendance at the school, or social circumstances (whether the school's cultural emphases or the family's social housing) were successful. Similarly, although the successful appeals included one case that cited the school's subject specialism and another case that cited the school's religious ethos, both of these cases also had serious medical grounds. In general, in cases where the appeal cited grounds related to the preferred school's offerings or its student body, the panel was likely to conclude that was likely to do equally well in the originally designated school.

Overall, these appeals data suggest a disconnect between the priorities and resources of parents and those of the local authority and the appeals panel. While the right to appeal for entry into a preferred school is statutory, the admission appeals process is costly in terms of time and resources. There are likely to also be mental and emotional costs for the parents and children due to the prolonged uncertainty about school allocations. Hence, it may be beneficial if parents lodged fewer appeals that were highly unlikely to succeed.

4.4 Interviews with oversubscribed and undersubscribed schools

- Oversubscribed schools may benefit from virtuous cycles of stability, effectiveness, and popularity.
- Conversely, undersubscribed schools struggle with mutually reinforcing effects of pupil mobility, budgetary and staffing uncertainty, and achievement challenges.

We spoke with two schools to understand the first-hand impact of parental choice on schools, teachers, parents and pupils. Whilst conducting initial research, we identified the Published Admission Number (PAN) as an important metric for our research question, hence the decision to speak to both an oversubscribed and an undersubscribed school. We interviewed school personnel either via telephone or email. Interview questions can be found in Appendix 6.4. We spoke to the headteacher and business manager of both an under and oversubscribed school respectively. Our interviewees' comments were made anonymous for the purpose of this report, and are detailed below.

Insights from the headteacher of an oversubscribed school

The school experiences many positive effects from having full enrolment. The school has an Ofsted rating of Outstanding and pupil headcount is at the PAN. This has a very positive effect on the way that the school is run: they have a full faculty of teachers, no split (i.e. mixed-year-group) classes, and one teacher per class. This has very positive effects on pupils and parents; and they have a stable, happy staff. They believe that the school admissions team do a great job under difficult circumstances and a huge amount of pressure.

In terms of suggested improvements to county-level systems for parental preference, it needs to be ensured that all schools are good schools. It is important to champion all schools in Cambridgeshire. This will ensure that parents feel that they have a lot of choice. For example, it would be good to share news stories about all schools rather than a few which are doing particularly well. It is necessary to work more proactively to ensure that schools don't go into 'Requires Improvement'. Sometimes information from the local authority is not shared until it is too late to turn things around. It would be helpful if the local authority shared its long-term strategy with schools, including details on how outstanding schools can help other schools. More information needs to be shared with the people charged with helping the schools, in accordance with the 2010 White Paper.[59] Finally, the situation is far more complex than just numbers; for example, a lack of money for social care means that some schools need to deal with a lot of safeguarding issues.

Insights from the business manager of an undersubscribed school

The school experiences budgetary constraints and staffing uncertainty due to its unfilled places. The school has the capacity for two full classes for each year group (i.e. two-form entry). However, due to lack of pupil numbers, it has not been possible to run full classes. Whilst there are benefits to teaching small classes, running classes which are not full obviously has an impact on budgeting. Also, the school often receives enrolment overspill from families moving into the area. It can be difficult to support pupils which have moved in-year if budgeting has not taken this into account. It also makes it difficult to manage staffing; whilst it would be good to appoint more permanent staff, it is difficult to be certain of the future needs of the school.

Additional uncertainty comes from pupils moving in and out of the school during the school year. When a school is not the first choice of parents, families continue to seek admission to their preferred school throughout the school year. If parents are successful and the students in question move away, it has an impact on morale for both teachers and fellow pupils. The teachers work incredibly hard, and losing pupils does have an impact on their morale. For pupils, they lose friends and receive an impression that another school is better. Fluctuating pupil numbers also generate logistical problems. When pupils move away, progress which has been made

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[59] Department for Education, 'The importance of teaching: the schools white paper 2010', https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-importance-of-teaching-the-schools-white-paper-2010.

by the teachers is lost and not recorded in attainment data. Conversely, as the school has spaces, pupils join throughout the year. These pupils often have additional needs and lower attainment. Support is often quickly needed for these pupils. However, the school may not the necessary resources to enable this.

It would help if the local authority improved communication to schools, and found fair ways to limit in-year pupil movements between schools. The level of communication from admissions has fallen and there is an increasing responsibility on the school. Whilst appreciating the need to reduce costs, it can be difficult to get hold of admissions and there are no longer email updates. This means that busy staff have to check the portal very regularly. It would be useful if the portal can be set up to send an email to the school every time a change occurs. Additionally, whilst not wanting to impact on parental choice, it would be useful to have a cut-off in the term where pupils need to stay in the school.

5. Conclusion and recommendations

5.1 Conclusions

What factors influence parental preference of schools?

We could interpret this question in three different ways. Firstly, we could take it to mean, *what factors do parents take into consideration when deciding on school preferences?*

According to our parent survey, the qualities that Cambridgeshire parents highly value in prospective schools include characteristics that affect child development; such as school leadership, school climate, curriculum, and academic achievements. Many parents are also highly concerned about the distance from home to school, which relates primarily to family resource constraints, but also to possibilities for links between the home, school, and neighbourhood community. The emphasis on school quality is supported by our analysis of secondary school admissions data, which found a correlation between a school's Ofsted rating and its popularity. The school admissions data also suggests that not all parents prioritise a short home-to-school commute: only 41% of parents named the catchment school as their first preference.[60] However, both the free-text comments in the parent survey as well as the summarised appeals data—in which 'transport' and 'convenience' were by far the most common reasons to lodge an appeal—indicate that home-to-school transport is a source of considerable stress for some families. Thus, our Cambridgeshire data align with other studies of parental preference in England, which found that parents care about both practicality and educational quality.

We could also take the question to mean, *what sources of information do parents use to influence their preference of schools?*

Based on the parent survey, Cambridgeshire parents are most likely to refer to school open days, word of mouth, school websites, Ofsted reports/Parent View, and their own experience and knowledge of local schools. Each of these five sources were consulted by at least half of the survey respondents. These findings correspond to national-level findings from the Sutton Trust's recent 'Parent Power' survey.[61] In our Cambridgeshire data, these five sources were most frequently named as one of the three most useful sources of information in deciding on school preferences. School open days were, by far, seen as the most useful source of information.

A final interpretation of the question could be, *what demographic factors influence differences in parental preference of schools?*

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[60] Note that applying in-catchment is an imperfect proxy for wanting to minimize home-to-school transport. In some areas, the catchment school may not be the nearest school.
[61] Rebecca Montacute and Carl Cullinane, 'Parent Power 2018' (The Sutton Trust, September 2018).

One key factor influencing how much parents can take advantage of the school admissions system is where in the county they live. As with England as a whole, Cambridgeshire has uneven geographic variation in the distribution of popular and unpopular schools, and in the likelihood of a family receiving a placement in their first preference. Another key factor is the family's socioeconomic background. While the parents that we surveyed prioritised the same school characteristics regardless of background, socioeconomically disadvantaged parents referred to fewer sources of information in making school choices—with especially big gaps for school open days and Ofsted information, which were regarded as the two most useful sources.

What are the outcomes of those preferences (and for whom)?

As noted in our discussion of school choice policies around the world, parental preference systems usually aim to serve three goals. We will discuss each of the three in turn.

One common goal of parental preference systems is *improving the overall quality of schools through market-based competition*, with parents acting as consumers who spur schools to raise their quality in order to attract more students. Unfortunately, our study cannot draw any conclusions about whether parental preference has improved the overall quality of Cambridgeshire schools.[62]

A second goal of many parental preference systems is *giving parents the freedom to choose the schools that would best suit their children*. Our data on this outcome are mixed. On one hand, in March and April 2018, 95% of Cambridgeshire families applying for primary school entry and 88% of families applying for secondary school entry were offered places in their first-preference schools. On the other hand, the parent survey revealed a great deal of frustration among some parents who felt that they did not have any meaningful choice of schools because desirable schools were out of their reach due to reasons including oversubscription, transport logistics, catchment boundaries, or childcare availability.

The third goal shared by many parental preference systems is *raising socioeconomic equity by giving lower-income families access to a range of schools*, a form of access that more affluent families already enjoy due to their capacity for paying fees at private schools. Here, our data suggest that the opposite is true in Cambridgeshire—as other studies have found for England as a whole. Although we cannot trace direct causal pathways from family income through parental preferences to student outcomes, our data sources suggest that the parental preference system reinforces, rather than

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[62] At the national level, two statistically sophisticated studies did not find evidence that school competition through the parental preference system led to any improvement in school quality. Rebecca Allen, 'Choice-based secondary school admissions in England: social stratification and the distribution of educational outcomes' (Institute of Education, University of London, PhD thesis, 2008); Rebecca Allen and Anna Vignoles, 'Can School Competition Improve Standards? The Case of Faith Schools in England', Empirical Economics 50, no. 3 (1 May 2016): 959–73.

weakening, the relationship between family affluence and pupil education. Firstly, the parent survey found that parents of FSM-eligible children referred to relatively fewer sources of information in making school preference decisions. This indicates that less privileged families are less likely to have the information needed to fully take advantage of the parental preference system. The parent survey also found that many parents had great concerns about home-to-school transport, a constraint more likely to be faced by less privileged families. Some comments also noted the benefits of buying houses in the catchment areas of desirable schools—an avenue that would likely be out of reach for less privileged families. All of this indicates that socioeconomically underprivileged children are more likely to be enrolled in less desirable schools. This was borne out by our analysis of school admissions data, which found that schools with higher proportions of FSM-eligible pupils are, on average, likely to have lower Ofsted ratings and more unfilled school places. This is especially troubling in light of the interviews we conducted, which indicate that oversubscribed schools may benefit from virtuous cycles while undersubscribed schools face vicious cycles that ultimately have impact on student outcomes and life chances.

5.2 Recommendations

Our recommendations focus on ensuring that families and schools have the information that they need to facilitate the optimal functioning of parental preference in school admissions for all children in Cambridgeshire. Access to information emerged as a key issue in our parent survey. It was also emphasised in our interviews with both an undersubscribed and an oversubscribed school. Furthermore, many of the school admissions challenges described by Council senior officers during our initial meetings also suggest inadequate information: families submitting late applications, families applying to schools they have no realistic chance of getting in, families who name the same school three times or who think they have a higher chance of getting in to their preferred school if they apply earlier. The importance of facilitating underprivileged families' access to information has also been underscored in the Sutton Trust's 'Parent Power' study,[63] as well as some of the international research discussed above.

While improving access to information is not a panacea, it has the potential to improve school admissions regardless of where in Cambridgeshire a family may live, and despite budgetary and legal constraints. Our recommendations aim to improve equity of access to schools for all in Cambridgeshire, whether in the city centre or a Fenland village, by improving families' understandings of school choice processes. We are mindful that Council budgets are limited. Although our recommendations do have some financial implications, the costs of setting up and maintaining informational webpages is far smaller than, for example, the cost of top-up funding for undersubscribed schools. We are also mindful that many aspects of the

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[63] Rebecca Montacute and Carl Cullinane, 'Parent Power 2018' (The Sutton Trust, September 2018).

parental preference system are enshrined in national legislation, such as the requirement that children be admitted in accordance with parental preference if a school's enrolment is below its PAN.[64] Notwithstanding these constraints, we believe that improving information flows is an efficient way to empower individual families and schools to better navigate the school admissions system, and also to promote collaboration between families and schools to improve access and outcomes together.

Recommendation 1: Use web-based tools to facilitate families' access to information on schools and admissions processes.

We propose a range of web-based approaches that address different aspects of parental preference and school admissions.

(a) Create microsites on the Council web page containing the guidance that is currently presented in the 'First Steps' and 'Next Steps' PDF booklets.

While the Council's 'First Steps' and 'Next Steps' booklets on primary and secondary school admissions are highly informative, they are also unwieldy (with the current edition of 'First Steps' weighing in at 148 pages). Furthermore, comments in the parent survey as well as observations from County senior officers suggest that many parents are not actually reading the information in these booklets. To remedy this, we recommend presenting the 'First Steps' and 'Next Steps' admissions guidance on a series of webpages, perhaps within a self-contained microsite for school admissions.

Based on our data analysis, we suggest adding the following information to the school admissions guidance:

- An acknowledgement that many families may have a limited range of choice in schools, due to limited educational budgets at the county and national levels. While such an acknowledgement may not improve the equity of access to schools, it may somewhat mitigate the frustration of parents who feel that school choice is illusory.
- Advice about the grounds on which school admissions appeals are usually upheld, i.e. circumstances posing serious threats to the child's safety or wellbeing, and what the Council regards as reasonable distances for home-to-school transport. This may reduce the volume of resources expended by both the Council and families on appeals that are highly unlikely to succeed.

We also suggest highlighting—perhaps by creating separate webpages—the following pieces of information that are already available in Cambridgeshire school admissions guidance:

- Information about the statutory home-to-school transport entitlement for FSM-eligible secondary school pupils attending any one of their three nearest

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[64] Education Reform Act 1988.

schools.[65] Access to school choice beyond the catchment school is particularly important at the secondary school level, where school offerings differ more widely. In 2018, two-thirds of Cambridgeshire families applied out of catchment for secondary school entry, and FSM-eligible pupils should be offered equitable access to out-of-catchment schools.

- A list of school open days. Although a list of Autumn 2018 open events at Cambridgeshire secondary schools appears in 'Next Steps' and on the Council's 'Starting Secondary School' leaflet, this list is difficult to locate if searching for open days via the Council's website. Given both the importance and the resource-intensiveness of attending school open days, as well as the fact that FSM-eligible families are less likely to attend open days, it is important to make it as easy as possible for families to find information and plan ahead.

- Other areas that may warrant consideration: in the parent survey, some respondents expressed frustration about the difficulty of finding adequate information about (i) admissions advice for pupils with SEND (especially those without statements/EHCPs), and (ii) information about the enrolment of summer-born children in Reception.

(b) Enhance the Schools Directory by adding admissions-related information to each school's page.

Another challenge for families seeking information about the school admissions process is the lack of a centralised source of information about Cambridgeshire schools. To make optimal use of the powerful search function of the Council website's Schools Directory,[66] which allows families to search for their nearest schools by location, we recommend adding to each school's page the admissions information that is currently in the 'First Steps' and 'Next Steps' booklets (i.e. catchment area, PAN, prior year's admissions allocation, and oversubscription criteria), as well as the dates of any scheduled open days.

We further recommend allocating space on each school's page for its school leaders to give a brief statement of values (with a character limit) and perhaps to upload a limited number of photographs of the school. Given that many survey respondents prioritise a school's leadership, climate, and ethos, such information would convey a snapshot of these crucial characteristics. Giving schools such room to present themselves to potential pupils also aligns with an interview observation from the headteacher of the oversubscribed school, who emphasised the importance of championing all schools, and not just high-performing schools, so that parents feel they have a good range of choices.

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[65] As recommended in Rebecca Montacute and Carl Cullinane, 'Parent Power 2018' (The Sutton Trust, September 2018).

[66] https://www.cambridgeshire.gov.uk/schools-directory/

(c) Investigate the viability of establishing an online carpool board to help parents coordinate school runs, especially to out-of-catchment schools.

Considerations about home-to-school transport can play a large role in the school preferences of many families, especially the less affluent. Facilitating carpooling arrangements for school runs will not only mitigate such logistical constraints, but also benefit the environment. For parents lacking the resources to drive their children to out-of-catchment schools, a carpool board could extend the range of school choices within their reach. For parents offering to share their school run with other children, one incentive could be the chance to split petrol costs. While establishing such an online carpool board would pose challenges of verification, safe-guarding, and data protection, the Council is, arguably, better-positioned than any other local institution to address such challenges. (One possibility could be linking user accounts to parents' log-ins for online school admissions applications.) Once the webpage has been designed and user legal agreements have been written, resource implications for the Council will be minimal, whereas potential benefits for parents will be sustained.

Recommendation 2: Ensure that schools have sufficient information to plan strategically for future admissions

Given that equitable access to the parental preference system is also mediated through schools, it is crucial for schools to have the information they need to effectively plan budgets, staffing structures, and class allocations for the optimal development of their pupils. In interviews, the headteacher and school business manager we spoke with suggested:

- Increased communication between the Council and schools, especially in terms of long-term strategy as well as anticipated changes in incoming student numbers (e.g. due to academy openings or real estate developments).
- Council brokerage of collaboration between schools (especially between high- and low-performing schools), to foster school improvement.
- An automated system of email notifications from the school admissions portal to schools when a change in admission allocations is made.

Recommendation 3: Investigate the possibility of including Pupil Premium eligibility as an oversubscription criterion for community and voluntary controlled schools.

Our analysis suggests that parental preference systems contribute to socioeconomic segregation between schools at the county-level. Prior analyses indicate that this is a nationwide phenomenon. One possible mechanism for reducing such segregation is the Sutton Trust's suggestion of using Pupil Premium eligibility as an oversubscription

criterion.[67] This may help the enrolments of oversubscribed schools to better reflect the socioeconomic diversity of their local communities, while simultaneously giving underprivileged students more equitable access to oversubscribed schools.

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[67] Rebecca Montacute and Carl Cullinane, 'Parent Power 2018' (The Sutton Trust, September 2018), p. 5.

6. Appendices

6.1 Parent survey: questionnaire instrument

Survey on school admissions and parental preference in Cambridgeshire

Thank you very much for your interest in this survey. Your firsthand experiences and opinions are valuable to our research.

This survey is part of a study that aims to develop evidence-based recommendations for improving school admissions and placement for all Cambridgeshire families. The study is being conducted by researchers from the Cambridge University Science and Policy Exchange (CUSPE), in collaboration with the Cambridgeshire County Council.

This survey will take approximate 7 minutes to complete. Your participation in this survey is entirely voluntary and you can withdraw at any time.

 The information that you enter in this survey will be used for research purposes only and will be analysed anonymously. This information will <u>not</u> be linked to any school admissions applications that you or your family make. Also, to help protect your confidentiality, this survey will <u>not</u> ask for your name, contact details, or other information that can be used to identify you personally.

For more information, please email Yue-Yi Hwa at yyh23@cam.ac.uk.

Q24 Selecting "I agree" below indicates that:
- you have read the above information, and
- you voluntarily agree to take part in this survey.

If you do not wish to take part in this survey, please close this web page. Thank you.

- ☐ I agree.

Which county division do you live in?

○ Cambridge City

○ East Cambridgeshire

○ Fenland

○ Huntingdonshire

○ South Cambridgeshire

Bence Börcsök, Erin Cullen, Yue-Yi Hwa   20 September 2018

Display This Question:

If Background information Which county division do you live in?* = Cambridge City

Which part of Cambridge City do you live in?

▼ Abbey ... Trumpington

Display This Question:

If Background information Which county division do you live in?* = East Cambridgeshire

Which part of East Cambridgeshire do you live in?

▼ Burwell ... Woodditton

Display This Question:

If Background information Which county division do you live in?* = Fenland

Which part of Fenland do you live in?

▼ Chatteris ... Wisbech West

Display This Question:

If Background information Which county division do you live in?* = Huntingdonshire

Which part of Huntingdonshire do you live in?

▼ Alconbury & Kimbolton ... Yaxley & Farcet

Display This Question:

If Background information Which county division do you live in?* = South Cambridgeshire

Which part of South Cambridgeshire do you live in?

▼ Bar Hill ... Waterbeach

Are your children eligible for free school meals?

◯ Yes

◯ No

◯ I don't know

Is English your first language?

◯ Yes

◯ No

How many children do you have who are currently enrolled in a state school (i.e. non-fee-paying school)?

_____

Your children and their school placements

What level of schooling is your ${lm://Field/2} child currently attending?

○ Primary (Reception–Year 6)

○ Secondary (Year 7–6th Form)

Do any of the following categories apply to your ${lm://Field/2} child?

☐ In-year transfer applicant

☐ Out-of-county applicant

☐ From a Service family (e.g. has a parent serving in the armed forces)

☐ Has been permanently excluded

☐ Looked After Child / previously Looked After Child

☐ SEND, <u>without</u> an Education Health and Care (EHC) plan

☐ SEND, <u>with</u> an Education Health and Care (EHC) plan

☐ From a Traveller/ Roma background

☐ None of the above

The school that my ${lm://Field/2} child is attending was my _____ in the school admission application.

○ 1st preference

○ 2nd preference

○ 3rd preference

○ Other _____

Is your ${lm://Field/2} child attending their catchment school (i.e. the school closest to their home)?

○ Yes

○ No

School preferences

How important are the following reasons for choosing a school for your child(ren)?

[*Note: The order of these reasons was randomised every time this question was displayed.*]

	Not important	Somewhat important	Important	Very important
The school is close to my home/workplace.	○	○	○	○
Other family members attend/attended the school.	○	○	○	○
The school has a good reputation.	○	○	○	○
The school offers a strong curriculum.	○	○	○	○
The school offers a variety of after-school activities.	○	○	○	○
The school has an active and pleasant school climate.	○	○	○	○
The school has nice facilities and grounds.	○	○	○	○
The headteacher and other school leaders are committed and competent.	○	○	○	○
The academic achievements of students in the school are high.	○	○	○	○
The school has a positive Ofsted rating.	○	○	○	○
⊗Other (please specify)	○	○	○	○

Carry Forward All Choices - Entered Text from "School preferencesHow important are the following reasons for choosing a school for your child(ren)?"

Which of the following reasons for choosing a school are <u>most important</u>? Select up to 3.

- ☐ The school is close to my home/workplace.
- ☐ Other family members attend/attended the school.
- ☐ The school has a good reputation.
- ☐ The school offers a strong curriculum.
- ☐ The school offers a variety of after-school activities.
- ☐ The school has an active and pleasant school climate.
- ☐ The school has nice facilities and grounds.
- ☐ The headteacher and other school leaders are committed and competent.
- ☐ The academic achievements of students in the school are high.
- ☐ The school has a positive Ofsted rating.
- ☐ ⊗Other (please specify)

What is the furthest distance for which you would be able to provide transport for your child from your home (or workplace) to your child's school?

	0 5 10 15 20 25
Distance in miles	━━━━━━━━━━●━━━━━━━━━━

Getting information about schools

How simple did you find it to access the information you needed to make a decision about school preferences?

◯ Very difficult

◯ Somewhat difficult

◯ Somewhat simple

◯ Very simple

Which sources of information did you refer to in deciding which schools you preferred for your child(ren)?

☐ My own/my family's experience and knowledge of local schools

☐ Word of mouth (e.g. from friends or neighbours)

☐ School open days

☐ School websites

☐ County Council website and school admissions guidance <u>online</u>

☐ County Council school admissions guidance <u>on paper</u>

☐ County Council Parents' School Preference Adviser

☐ Ofsted reports or Ofsted Parent View

☐ Department for Education website or school performance tables

☐ Other websites (i.e. not run by schools, the Council, or other government offices)

☐ Other (please specify) _____

Carry Forward Selected Choices - Entered Text from "Which sources of information did you refer to in deciding which schools you preferred for your child(ren)?"*

Which sources of information were <u>most helpful</u> in deciding which schools you preferred for your child(ren)? Select up to 3.

- ☐ My own/my family's experience and knowledge of local schools
- ☐ Word of mouth (e.g. from friends or neighbours)
- ☐ School open days
- ☐ School websites
- ☐ County Council website and school admissions guidance <u>online</u>
- ☐ County Council school admissions guidance <u>on paper</u>
- ☐ Cambridgeshire School Preference Adviser
- ☐ Ofsted reports or Ofsted Parent View
- ☐ Department for Education website or school performance tables
- ☐ Other websites (i.e. not run by schools, the Council, or other government offices)
- ☐ Other (please specify)

Any other comments: Final thoughts

Do you have any other comments about parental preference for school admissions?

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

6.2 Parent survey: free-text comments

I wish it didn't exist. It causes families who don't get their choices extreme stress and inconvenience when they are allocated schools miles from their home, and years of worry on this account to those of us in catchment black holes. Parents engage in sharp practice (for egg temporary renting in catchment or giving grandparents addresses) to gain a preferred place, and the council is unwilling or unable to commit the resources to stamping this out. The right of a child to attend the school nearest their home should trump 'parental choice' which in many years is an illusion anyway. The council trumpets the fact that 90% of parents get one of their three 'choicez', ignoring the fact that - especially if older siblings are already in one school - getting a second or third 'choice' is an unmitigated disaster and does not represent 'choice' at all, just a requirement of the admissions process to write down three schools on the form.

Not all schools have good road access / parking facilities, which creates a lot of safety issues when children live further away from school and parents rely on car transport.

Primary Reality is there is little or no parental preference for many parents. It's either only school in village, they have siblings (can't do 2 school runs) or get parked elsewhere by CCC as school full. We live 5 mins' walk away (<1/4 mile) from nearest school Ely St John but most kids on our road won't get in as school oversubscribed simply as only nearby school on large, new housing estate. Child 1 got in as had sibling at time of application, needed kids in same place (it's an OK but not a great school). Parents have to apply to non-catchment school eg Witchford Rackham, Lt Thetford as they might get in on 1st pref but will lose out on 2nd round allocation. Poss different story other side of Ely as they can easily walk to Lantern, Isle of Ely, Spring Meadow/EStM. Secondary Will struggle for Year 7 place at preferred school for Sep 2019 admission as again likely to be oversubscribed - it's a numbers game, preference has less to do with it. Hard on child who assumes she's going to same school as siblings (having picked them up from activities, attended shows and concerts etc it's the one she knows) Sixth Form Ludicrous that Ely doesn't have proper sixth form provision (Bishop Laney trying but doesn't have facilities or range of subjects). There should be full A levels at decent college hub based near Ely station so that students from Ely, Witchford, (LECA) & Soham don't have to travel to Cambridge. Again seems to be lots of "post-16 options" but getting to Impington, Netherhall, Comberton from Ely not viable, CRC's a pain and train fare to Hills/Long is £600 pa

There is no real choice for secondary schools. You just get a place in your catchment school, or other schools even worse than it.

Hearing views of the school from parents who know the school and its staff and ethos has provided me with more insightful information than formal inspection snapshots, although I did refer to CCC league tables to inform my decisions. For background, my catchment school is the Grove, my family and others in my area have chosen Milton CE primary instead.

I think the reasons will vary on how important people think grades are Vs those who are less fussed about a school being perfect long as kids are happy

It was her frustrating being on county border with nearest school (out of county) and having to fill in separate paperwork

That in Cambridge there is a real issue with wealthy parents renting in catchment of successful schools then moving once they have their places

I found it really difficult to get information on how the preference ranking system actually works - e.g. in what order applicants are assigned to preferences where there was oversubscriptuon, which had some influence on my choice of how to rank schools.

My child is currently in year 6 and did not get her preference for secondary school. We were only offered the catchment school as all other schools were oversubscribed. We have had to choose an independent out of county school for her due to not feeling the only choice offered met her needs. This is going to be financially and logistically challenging.

Due to catchment areas there is virtually no choice of school in reality.

More information on when the school open days are for those new to the area!

We moved house to get into the right school catchment. I would be extremely unhappy if the school preferences had be opened up to out of catchment children. I believe you should continue to give preferance to those who live closest to the school.

I would have preferred a local faith school (Catholic) but there are none close enough to realistically attend with a 4yo and those are almost always oversubscribed.

Might it be useful to gather data on why particular groups are not choosing particular schools?

Some schools have poor levels of information on their website to aid decisions and others are awkward to get an open day date (only 2 weeks notice of each date, hence difficult to book time off work).

Firstly you missed Milton off the drop down so I couldn't fill in that question. Secondly as nice as it is to think parental preference counts, in so many cases it doesn't and people who pick an out of catchment school rarely get it, from what I see. This is why when we bought our house we only looked at ones in the catchment of primary schools we would be happy with. We were prepared to do this again for secondary but fortunately didn't need to as our catchment school is so good.

As I said earlier. This is an illusion of choice - there is no way to get in to any school other than your catchment in the area of cambridge I am in so I don't know why they offer a preference at all. All it does is offer false hope

Not easy to get schools to tell you the full breakdown of their GCSE or Alevels results. But this detail is really useful and I see no reason why they shouldn't be required to publish it online. Sixth form application system was a complete fiasco with Hills Road refusing to confirm whether my son could do the subjects he'd requested until AFTER term started. This caused us to mess Long Road about using them as a backup until Hills Road finally decided whether they could offer my son the subjects he wanted in early September.

It takes too long from application to hearing to finding out about places.

It would be useful to know if you can have a place at the school when applying for a preschool place. I have taken up a preschool place readying my son for school but we don't know if he can have a place at that school. If I knew for sure I couldn't get a place at this school I would not choose this preschool. The current system offers no security for parents wanting continuity of care from preschool to school. Some of my friends are doing two preschool places so that there's more likelihood one of them might be the school their kid goes to

Secondary schools seem to hold their open days too close to the admissions application deadline. It would be more helpful to hold these for year 5 pupils and to publicise them more widely to allow more time to decide on where to apply.

Reducing and acaemisation seems to have left our secondaries unable to make a coherent overall provision for Huntingdonshire

Out of catchment should be allowed for siblings of mainstream children with SEN to facilitate them being at the same school

We were moving from overseas when my son was entering school and was difficult in terms of providing address. We went to catchment school but then moved farther away as impossible to afford housing on Cambridge city where our children are at school. Now traveling 5 miles to a good school.

I believe that the entire school structure needs to change. Judging children, and on academic performance alone, is destructive. My children are younger than school age but I am considering unschooling at home after reading Peter Gray, Ken Robinson, John Holt, Ross Mountney. I don't want my children to spend their lives indoors and being taught, especially when they are so young.

The selection of school is largely irrelevant when you live in a village with one school. The choice is (a) the local school or (b) somewhere else that will be a complete nightmare to get to and leave a child socially isolated by not living near their school and school friends. The artifice of "choice" is pointless for villages, and the possibility of not getting a place in the local school merely adds enormous stress. When considering villages the aim should be that every child has a place within the village school, and not to give parents more choice.

Secondary school options are a real issue for this area. The two nearest schools are not our catchment and children are sent to a school with a bad reputation many miles away.

yes -I think that Cambridgeshire city council are not moving with the times in regards to providing transportation to schools and they are splitting villages / towns into two to allocate permanent bus spaces / free of charge. The majority of parents work full time and I feel that there should be fairer system.

Given the appalling traffic in Cambridge living near school is the key issue

En-route to work base could be an option

When you have more than one child, there are other things to consider as well, eg when one child moves schools and you have two children who need to be taken to school at similar times but different locations.

Keeping siblings together especially now some schools have different holiday dates so hard to cover

We have 4 catchment schools in our area and our child attends the one furthest from our home.

I think it is very important to offer parental choice by allowing faith schools.

From visiting schools it was clear that SEN and mental health support was a very low priority compared Ofsted tables and national curriculum.

An other important factor is culture and discipline of school. Need a stable staff, who are qualified. Too many non qualified teachers in several Cambridgeshire schools.

It would be useful to know, for each school, how oversubscribed it has been, annually, for the previous 5 years

Too many schools are being allowed to reject children with Sen

We only got our 1st preference for Secondary school by going through the appeals process. Parental/student choice is a myth, the system is skewed so that only the catchment school is easy to gain a place at or get to if admitted. If you live near the edge of the catchment you can be nearer other schools but still not be provided with transport to these schools even though they are closer than the catchment school. Cambridgeshire admissions is set up so that preference is really a paper exercise & not a reality. People who exercise their choice are punished by lack of transport provision. It takes a huge amount of commitment for parents to transport children to a non catchment school because they believe it is the best school for their child.

[Child's name redacted] had SEN but due to primary reluctance to assess, he was left vulnerable. His preferred school was oversubscribed, and as his sister had left the year before, he went down the criteria. He was left with a school that he was unfamiliar with, and that he refused to enter. Not sure how that can be addressed within parental preference...

I am lucky that my child was previously a looked after child as I think secondary school will be a harder choice.

There are not enough SEN placements designed for individual needs in Cambridgeshire. SEN pupils should have choices for their parents to choose from. The LA should be funding greater amounts of places and not forcing many into totally unsuitable mainstream settings

Parents don't actually have a lot of choice to go to schools outside of their catchment, especially if they are over subscribed

Ofsted reports aren't very useful

My children are only at their first choice school because we appealed. Despite the school not being full and keen to take our children the LEA said no.

Forced into catchment school. No Catholic placed

Parental preference is generally a myth especially where there is SEN involved. We have been discriminated against and treated as second class citizens, I have been shocked at the way some schools denied access to a visit as there was an EHCP in place. For our non SEN child everything was very straightforward. It is a disgrace how many families are treated but it seems very little is ever done to amend it. I quote on requesting a visit to a school I said' "my son has an EHCP" head of inclusions response "oh, we have had a few of those and it hasn't gone well" (I am happy to share the details and email trail supporting this).

Knowing that schools can drop places due to data issues, I don't hold much faith in Ofsted reports.

Consideration should be given for families outside catchment if they have good reasons for selecting the school, ie. Support network

It changed because a new primary school was built.near us

We didn't have any real choice as our preferred school in impington always oversubscribed and we live at wrong end of Cottenham to have got a place

Not enough choice for parents that have children/young people with send

Primary school open days seemed not to be publicised. Too much emphasis on catchment areas take away parental preference (it becomes income determined due to house price differentials around good schools)

Attending the local school was the key consideration for us. Hopefully the school will improve on its less than good academic results.

We chose a school further from home as we preferred the environment of the school and wrap- around care was available. This was not the case at the more local school.

Parents near the edge of catchments for popular schools may get the worst of both worlds - they miss out on their catchment school and miss out on neighbouring catchment schools. Parents' place of work is also a big influencing factor on school preference, making the difference between a sensible commute and a difficult one. Keeping siblings together at the same school (especially if the older sibling still has several years to go) is very important for the children and the parents. A family can get their eldest into a non-catchment school, but the younger siblings can then be ranked in importance below all catchment children without siblings already at the school. Then a parent ends up with a multiple-school-run.

Having a summer born child I would have liked to have had the option of keeping my daughter back a year as she is very young for her age and was born prematurely. Even now I find she is able to socialise more easily with children in the year below her. I believe she would have benefitted from an extra year in nursery before starting school and would not struggle as much as she has. This unfortunately did not seem to be an option that is available (or if it is, it is kept very quiet) which is a detriment to young summer born children and the implications of feeling behind from day one has the potential to impact future educational prospects. It is sorely disappointing that this has not even featured as a question in this survey.

It's a farce around here. I can only get my child into another school if I provide the transport. We need better transport links in south Cambs

We recently moved house, nearer to our target school for our child who will be starting in September (although we were in catchment already)

The idea of giving parents 'choice ' detracts from the variable standards between schools. We don't need choice, we need to know that all schools provide a good service so that we're happy for our child to go to their local school.

Useless - you missed the deadline twice and the message on the web site has not even been updated - hopeless

Personally we DO NOT have a choice. It is all very well saying we have but we don't. It is catchment school or nothing. I am lining myself up for disappointment for my child applying for secondary school. Not in preferred choice catchment so I doubt she will get in. By the time I applied for 2nd child's primary school, I put the catchment school as first choice as there was no point putting anything else. I am very disillusioned. My catchment school has not got a regular reliable out of school care provision for working parents who dare need 8-6 childcare so I am SKINT paying a childminder over £400 a month simply so I can go to work 3 days per week. DISGUSTING! What message is this is teaching the next generation.

Parental preference feels as though it has very little influence currently especially if you are in a bulge year, we were 38th on the waiting list that we would have got into the year preceding and following

Very slow process still waiting to find out the outcome not happy

It is wrong that wanting a non-faith school as a preference cannot be taken into account in admission, but faith can be considered. Faith schools should not be able to prioritise children form families with faith.
What is the point of offering preference when in reality there's no choice!!! Every school should be an 'outstanding' school
Good Service.
I don't think it's fair that some children have multiple schools "in catchment" and others only have one. I think everyone should have a true choice.
Yes, I have a real reason to apply for a certain out of catchment college, there are apparently buses that run, but I really don't know how to go about it
The size of the school was important to us as our daughter was shy so we looked for a smaller school
When choosing the school for our first child, we thought we had a say in the decision. We did not get any of our choices, and were put in the 7th nearest school, with not very good reputation. I had to reduce my hours at work to be able to cycle to school as I do not drive. We appealed to be able to get in to our catchment school, but did not get anywhere. We waited almost 2 years to get a place in the second nearest school (still not the catchment school) as it is oversubscribed. We kept being 1st on the waiting list, and then 2nd, as new people who moved in the area got in before us. I would make this as a criteria, "how long you have lived in the catchment for". We felt that our daughter has lost all her nursery friend connections, as cycling back from a far away school does not leave much window for playdates. We still feel a bit far away from our old nursery/playgroup friends community, who all go to a local school, while we go to one that is a bit further away. Also, parents should not be made to believe they have a choice, as it really does not make any difference.
Having warm welcoming feeling and a feeling that they put the kids first
I just wish all schools were good or above and then you didn't need to chose!
First choice had to be catchment school as it's the only one with free travel. I'm a disabled single mother on benefits so no excess income to pay for travelling expenses and not able to routinely take and collect from another school
It doesn't really come down to parental preference when there is only one school in the catchment area. Although we are told we "have a choice" at the end of the day the chances of your child/children getting a placement at a good school that is out of catchment is slim to none.
We love the infant school we have chosen but applied in the hope that the junior school would have a change on management by the time of child had completed infants. I know many parents who simply chose to go to Fourfields rather than risk applying to a fantastic infant school because of the risk of their children ending up at William de Yaxley.
I think choice of secondary school should be based on more than catchment area or siblings. If your child has a special interest or aptitude in a subject which a school has proven to specialise in then that should also be considered.
Very difficult to make decisions with a child with SEND. Professionals refuse to give guidance. Daughter is Blind and we have no clue where she should attend for secondary education.
The area in which we live is not listed in this questionnaire. Haslingfield

I would travel a long way for the right school. It is frustrating that there is no room for my youngest at our excellent catchment school despite his having a sibling in the school. The next best school with space makes our school run an hour long and involves a drive. While I believe he is physically safe there (unlike at other schools) it is not a good fit philosophically as it is not secular.
I would choose a school where the children were unaware of sats and spent more time outside over anything else if it was available!
Ofsted reports do not always give a true reflection of a school. Just because the data shows children are achieving more highly in a school does not mean that school is better. I have seen 'outstanding' places of education which have teachers who don't put in anywhere near the effort of those in schools with lower ofsted ratings. As a parent although academic achievement is important the wellbeing and happiness of my children is of greatest importance because if they don't feel safe and happy they will not learn.
The criteria for admitting pupils should be published due to the many parents moaning about their children not getting a place. Publishing (or making it easier to find) the criteria would enable for them to understand better (or one would hope)
I believed my child would struggle to cope with a 3 class intake school, as is our catchment school, so we made the decision based on our childs personality (our early years preschool staff would have supported our opinion) to try to place him in a 1 class school. I believe concerns such as these should be considered in the application process.
We find it so frustrating that our closest school by a considerable distance is not our catchment school. In fact by distance there are 3 schools closer to us than our catchment school. Such poor planning when building new housing developments.
I feel it's unfair that parents out of a catchment area get top priority to a school when children living within walking distance don't get places, as those parents have to drive anyway so it does not make much difference to them to drive to another school in the area.
The views of parents of SEN pupils should be seen as a valuable insight into their childs needs

6.3 School appeals data summary

Key
Grounds for appeal

Transport	T
Convenience	C
Academic	A
Medical Parent	MP
Medical Child	MV
Medical Sibling	MS
Subject specialism	SS
Social care	SC
Bullying	B
Friendship group	FG
Fleeing DV	FDV
Sibling	S
Marriage Breakdown	MB
Religious ethos	R

YEAR	GROUNDS FOR APPEAL	DECISION	REASON FOR DECISION
5	S, T	Dismissed	Prejudice to school in admitting a further child greater than prejudice to child in not attending school. Panel felt that distance to school was not unreasonable and that there was no education or social reason that child would not do well at offered school
2	T, MS, C	Dismissed	Decision to refuse not unreasonable. Child's sibling was receiving medical & social support. Admission Authority had correctly applied its criteria – medical or health needs not relevant for purposes of allocation. Other local schools available.
9	MV, SS	Upheld	Prejudice to child in not attending the school greater than prejudice to school. Appealed school best placed to support child given the level of support required (child found to suffer with a number of mental health issues).
7	B, SS	Dismissed	Prejudice to school in admitting a further child greater than prejudice to child in not attending school. Offered school offered similar language courses and had obligation to tackle all forms of bullying.
7	R, MV	Dismissed	Prejudice to school in admitting a further child greater than prejudice to child in not attending school. Child able to practise faith outside of school; medical/social issues already well managed and would be continued to be so at offered school.

20 September 2018

YEAR	GROUNDS FOR APPEAL	DECISION	REASON FOR DECISION
7	MP, SC	Upheld	Prejudice to child in not attending the school greater than prejudice to school. Child acts as carer to parent and high level of prejudice in not attending local school with degree of pastoral care demonstrated.
7	B, C, SC	Dismissed	Prejudice to school in admitting a further child greater than prejudice to child in not attending school. Bullying could be dealt with by offered school; offered school much closer to family home than appealed school.
7	R, SC, MV	Upheld	Prejudice to child in not attending the school greater than prejudice to school. Child understood to have inherited parent's medical conditions and would benefit from high level of pastoral care at appealed school.
7	B	Dismissed	Prejudice to school in admitting a further child greater than prejudice to child in not attending school. Child's school experience had shown sign of improving and it was understood that incidents of bullying should be managed by offered school.
7	C	Dismissed	Prejudice to school in admitting a further child greater than prejudice to child in not attending school. Very little information provided; No reason the child could not do very well at offered school
7	C, T	Upheld	The Panel did not find that there would be any prejudice to the School in admitting an additional child; child admitted without the need to consider the merits of the appeal.
7	A, SS	Dismissed	Prejudice to school in admitting a further child greater than prejudice to child in not attending school. Offered school's curriculum considered to be appropriate for child and it was not found that the appealed school offered the child a particular academic advantage.
7	FG, SC, MV	Dismissed	Prejudice to school in admitting a further child greater than prejudice to child in not attending school; prejudice to school found to be very high.
7	SC, C	Dismissed	Prejudice to school in admitting a further child greater than prejudice to child in not attending school. Inconvenience in attending offered school not considered to be unusual or severe. Family bereavement had affected the child but it was not felt that the circumstances would be substantially different is appealed school place had been offered.

YEAR	GROUNDS FOR APPEAL	DECISION	REASON FOR DECISION
8	B, MV, FDV	Upheld	Prejudice to child in not attending the school greater than prejudice to school. Child suffering panic attacks and anxiety following prolonged bullying. Child and parent victim of DV. Potential risk to child in attending at offered school given proximity to father's new family.
7	B, C, T	Dismissed	Prejudice to school in admitting a further child greater than prejudice to child in not attending school. Older child bullied at school but no evidence this would be true of younger child at offered school. Parents work near appealed school but distance to offered school not unreasonable.
7	FG, C, T	Dismissed	Prejudice to school in admitting a further child greater than prejudice to child in not attending school. Distance to offered school manageable and child able to cycle. Every expectation that child would settle and make new friends at offered school.
3	C, T	Dismissed	Prejudice to school in admitting a further child greater than prejudice to child in not attending school. Parents will struggle to manage school runs to two separate schools. However, distances not unreasonable and travel logistics not a matter for the AA's allocation criteria.
7	A, MV	Dismissed	Prejudice to school in admitting a further child greater than prejudice to child in not attending school. Heard in absence. Evidence showed that child was improving academically and there was no evidence that he wouldn't do well at school offered.
7	FG, SC	Dismissed	Prejudice to school in admitting a further child greater than prejudice to child in not attending school. Child considered to have adapted well into local community following family's move from abroad. Little prejudice in child attending offered school as it was considered they would make new friends.
7	R, SS, MP	Dismissed	Prejudice to school in admitting a further child greater than prejudice to child in not attending school. Child able to practice faith and extracurricular activities outside of school. Child could continue to find support, in respect of parent's illness, at church.

YEAR	GROUNDS FOR APPEAL	DECISION	REASON FOR DECISION
7	R, C, FG	Dismissed	Prejudice to school in admitting a further child greater than prejudice to child in not attending school. Whilst convenience in attending more local school given one parent travel frequently with the military, distance to the school not unreasonable. Appealed school offers high pastoral care which will help child adapt to new environment and cope with parent's absence. However, child already receives support from church and low prejudice to child in attending school offered.
1	MV, SC	Dismissed	Decision to refuse not unreasonable; child's learning difficulties and parents housing complications did not affect this. AA found to have applied its admission criteria correctly and impartially and the infant class limit had been reached.
R	FG, C	Dismissed	Decision to refuse not unreasonable; every expectation child would make further friends at offered school and distance to school not unusual. AA found to have applied its admission criteria correctly and impartially and the infant class limit had been reached.
R	FG, C, T	Dismissed	Decision to refuse not unreasonable; distance to offered school not unreasonable – school run logistics not a matter for the AA. AA found to have applied its admission criteria correctly and impartially and the infant class limit had been reached.
R	C, MV, T	Dismissed	Decision to refuse not unreasonable; distance to offered school not unreasonable. AA found to have applied its admission criteria correctly and impartially and the infant class limit had been reached.
R	C, T	Dismissed	Decision to refuse not unreasonable; school run may become complicated due to parents change of work, however distance to school was not unreasonable. Preference for school on 'cultural' grounds. However, AA found to have applied its admission criteria correctly and impartially and the infant class limit had been reached.
R	C, T	Dismissed	Decision to refuse not unreasonable; parent already has children in appealed school - however distance to offered school was not in itself unreasonable. AA found to have applied its admission criteria correctly and impartially and the infant class limit had been reached.

YEAR	GROUNDS FOR APPEAL	DECISION	REASON FOR DECISION
R	C, T, FG, MB	Dismissed	Decision to refuse not unreasonable; child's circs not unusual or uncommon. No reasons child could not adapt to offered school which was within walking distance of family home. AA found to have applied its admission criteria correctly and impartially and the infant class limit had been reached.
R	A, C, T	Dismissed	Decision to refuse not unreasonable; distance to school not unreasonable and school performance would naturally fluctuate. No clear reason child could not do well at offered school. AA found to have applied its admission criteria correctly and impartially and the infant class limit had been reached.
R	C, T	Dismissed	Decision to refuse not unreasonable. Childcare arrangements would be made difficult given their availability in relation to school offered. However, this was not sufficient to make the decision unreasonable. AA found to have applied its admission criteria correctly and impartially and the infant class limit had been reached.
R	B	Upheld	Decision to refuse unreasonable. AA had information relating to safeguarding risk to child given history of behaviour between child's parents and other family attending the offered school.
R	R, S	Dismissed	Decision to refuse not unreasonable. Although child has a sibling at what is a faith school, it is apparent that AA had correctly and impartially applied its admission criteria and that the ICS had been reached.
R	C, S, T	Dismissed	Decision to refuse not unreasonable. Evidence showed that child could do well at offered school; school run logistics not a matter for the AA in applying its admission criteria, which had been correctly and impartially applied in this case. Distance to school within statutory walking limit and not unreasonable.

6.4 Interview questions

Hi there!

We are a team of researchers from the Cambridge University Science and Policy Exchange (CUSPE), who are collaborating with the Cambridgeshire County Council in an initiative called Policy Challenges. The Policy Challenges seek to address tough challenges facing Cambridgeshire using rigorous research. For more information on the Policy Challenges, please refer to: https://www.cambridgeshire.gov.uk/news/academics-and-councillors-join-together-to-tackle-issues-facing-our-county/)

The question that our team is addressing is "What factors influence parental preference of schools and what are the outcomes of those preferences (and for whom)?" We really appreciate your input, and your answers will be anonymised when used to inform our report to the Council.

What would you say the status of your school is regarding planned pupil admissions (PAN) numbers and actual pupil admission numbers?

Would you say that this has a positive or negative effect on the way the school is run (and in what way, e.g. staffing structure, split-year-group classes, and in-year pupil mobility)?

What effect would you say that this has on the pupils and parents?

What effect would you say that this has on the teachers?

Do you think the Published PAN could be dealt with/ estimated more effectively?

Do you have any suggestions for improving county-level systems for parental preference and school placements?

Do you have any questions about the project?

Many thanks for your time,

Erin Cullen