



Fairer School Admissions

Social segregation in schools: the view from parents & teachers



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KEY FINDINGS

- Sutton Trust data shows that the highest ranked schools accept around half the rate of disadvantaged pupils as the national average, and that over a quarter of such schools take in substantially fewer disadvantaged pupils than live in their catchment area. This contributes to a socially segregated school system. This research brief looks at how teachers and parents see the problem and how they might view potential solutions.
- Half of secondary school leaders feel that this socio-economic segregation is a problem in the comprehensive school system. But 43% report that their schools take the socio-economic profile of their local community into little or no account when designing their admissions policies.
- 38% of senior leaders do say they take the socio-economic make-up of their local community into account when setting admissions policies. Schools who reported to do so are less likely to be socially selective in their admissions.
- Teachers are much more likely to perceive that they take a higher rate of disadvantaged pupils than a lower one. 50% of secondary leaders say they take a higher than average proportion of disadvantaged pupils from their local community, and just 9% say they take a lower rate.
- 71% of teachers in the most socially selective schools feel that their school has no problem with the balance of their intake, and 74% believe their intake has average or higher levels of disadvantage than the neighbourhoods they draw pupils from, despite admissions data showing they take substantially fewer.
- 69% of teachers overall, and 71% of senior leaders, feel that reducing socio-economic segregation and improving social mix would have a positive effect in comprehensive schools. Potential positive impacts identified included increasing social cohesion, reducing the disadvantage attainment gap, and reducing the impact of intakes on school league tables.
- Almost two thirds (62%) of secondary leaders were open to conducting a fair admissions review of their policies. Opinions on how best to tackle the problem are more mixed, with teachers split between random ballots, prioritisation of disadvantaged pupils, and banding tests.
- 80% of parents believe state schools should have a mix of pupils from different backgrounds. 76% say that intakes should reflect the make-up of the local community, and 69% say high achieving schools should make an effort to take in pupils from less well-off backgrounds.
- Parents' views on more tangible change to admissions are more mixed. But 42% of middle class parents believe that it is fairer to allocate places at an oversubscribed school using ballots that give everyone an equal chance, compared to just looking at proximity of their home to school.

INTRODUCTION

Over the last 15 years, and most recently in 2019, the Sutton Trust has explored how the socio-economic profile of pupils attending comprehensive schools differ.¹ These reports have consistently shown that many of England's highest performing comprehensive schools are, in practice, often highly socially selective, admitting much lower proportions of pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds than the national average, and even than their immediate locality.

In 2019, *Selective Comprehensives: Great Britain* demonstrated that state schooling across Great Britain is highly socially segregated.² Rates of disadvantaged students at the highest performing schools are about half of that in the average school across all three countries. The reasons for these differences vary across nations. In England and Wales, about half of this disadvantage gap can be explained by the location of the top-ranked schools in more affluent areas. In England, the free school meal (FSM) eligibility rate in the catchment areas of such schools was 12.8%, 4.7 percentage points below the average

comprehensive. In Wales it was 13.6%, 5.2 below the Welsh average. In Scotland, the catchment rate at top schools was even lower, at 9.1%, 7.2 percentage points beneath the average Scottish school. In Scotland, where most pupils attend their nearest school, the entirety of the disadvantage gap can be explained by the location of schools in more advantaged areas. In Wales and England, which operate systems of school choice, top schools are socially selective even in comparison to the neighbourhoods from which they draw their pupils – they are not reflecting the communities on their doorsteps.

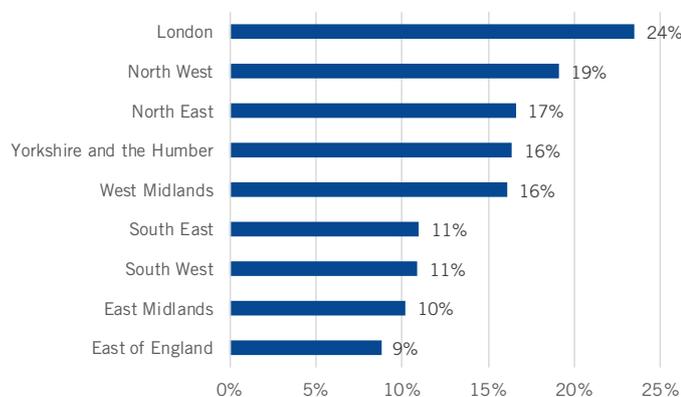
This segregation has far reaching consequences for educational opportunity. High achieving pupils from well-off backgrounds and experienced teachers cluster in a group of schools with high academic results, good reputations and high rates of progression to top universities. Whereas many other schools cater to extremely deprived communities with pupils who often have complex needs, with lower league table results and Ofsted ratings. This segregation becomes self-fulfilling, as ambitious parents seek to ensure their child goes to the 'better' schools, and many of the most experienced and qualified teachers prefer to avoid schools perceived as 'difficult'. The Sutton Trust's *Recruitment Gap* powerfully demonstrated the impact of levels of disadvantage in a school can have on teacher recruitment and retention.³ This dynamic of segregation is fundamental to many of the divides in the education system and Britain's lack of social mobility. More schools with socio-economically balanced intakes would address many of the problems in the school system and improve social cohesion more generally, as well as helping to make the system of school choice work for families of all backgrounds.

The Sutton Trust has consistently advocated for national policy change in this area, and altering the school admissions code *could* make a significant impact on segregation. But power doesn't just lie with government. Academisation in England has meant that schools themselves have increasing levels of autonomy, and a large proportion now control their own admissions policies. Schools, along with multi-academy trusts and local authorities, have to the power to drive change themselves. There is no doubting the level of challenge involved in seeking to alter this dynamic, but the potential benefits are substantial. Complementing the Trust's longstanding work on this issue, this research brief looks at how schools themselves view the issues of social segregation and social selectivity, the barriers to change, and the potential impacts of reform.

Table 1. Social selectivity of schools compared to catchment

School intake FSM rate compared to catchment	Number of schools	Proportion of top 500 schools	Proportion of all schools
10+ percentage points lower (most socially selective)	99	7.9%	3.2%
5-10 percentage points lower	368	19.4%	11.8%
1-5 percentage points lower	923	44.4%	29.6%
+/- 1 percentage points (around average)	608	20.4%	19.5%
1-5 percentage points higher	705	6.7%	22.6%
5-10 percentage points higher	311	0.8%	10%
10+ percentage points higher (least socially selective)	99	0.8%	3.2%

Figure 1. Proportion of schools categorised as substantially socially selective (5 percentage point gap or more), by region



Social selectivity in schools

Sutton Trust work has shown large numbers of schools, particularly those with the highest exam results, take in fewer disadvantaged pupils than live in their local areas.⁴ Using admissions data to analyse the catchment areas secondary schools in England draw their pupils from,⁵ along with information on rates of free school meals eligibility, schools can be divided into groups based on how their intakes reflect the socio-economic characteristics of their locality.

Nationally, most school intakes were within 5 percentage points of the rate of FSM eligible pupils living within their catchment area, with an even spread of schools taking more or less than live in their catchment area. However, within the top 500 performing schools based on attainment, there was a substantial skew towards schools taking in fewer FSM pupils than lived in their area. 27% of such schools had a gap of

greater than 5 percentage points.

Bearing in mind a national rate of FSM eligibility in England of around 14%, schools with rates of FSM eligibility of more than 5 percentage points lower than their catchment areas were defined as substantially socially selective (for example, an FSM rate of 7% compared with a rate of 14% of those living in the catchment area). Those with a 1 to 5 percentage point gap were defined as slightly socially selective. Schools with FSM rates within plus or minus 1 percentage point of their catchments were regarded as meeting the local average and thus generally representative of their area, while the least socially selective schools had FSM eligible intakes 5+ percentage points *higher* than their catchment area.

The group of substantially selective schools are located across all parts of the country (around 15% of all secondary schools), but the geographical distribution is highly

skewed. London schools have the highest proportion of socially selective schools, partly a result of the high population density meaning catchment areas are more fluid and a higher rate of pupils can travel to schools beyond the one that is nearest. The North East, North West and Yorkshire also show high levels of selective schools. The East of England and the East Midlands are more likely to have schools which reflect their locality (Figure 1). Academies, free schools and faith schools are all over-represented in the group of selective schools.

But how do teachers and parents view this issue, and how can it be addressed?

Methods

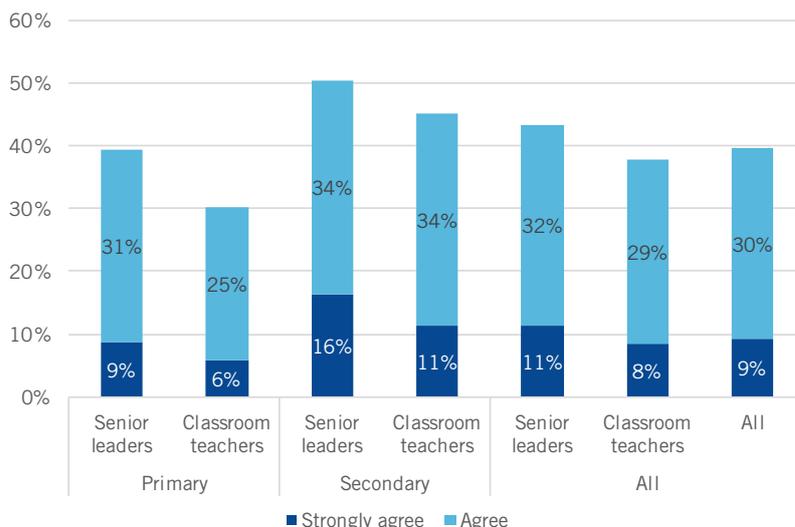
In order to explore the attitudes of schools and parents to school admissions, two surveys were conducted in the winter of 2019/2020. 1,506 classroom teachers and senior leaders in mainstream state non-selective schools in England, across both primary and secondary level, were surveyed through the NFER's Teacher Voice Omnibus. Teachers completed the survey online between 8th-13th November 2019. Respondents were nationally representative in terms of school type, performance and type of local authority. The sample is weighted to achieve national representation in terms of rates of free school meals eligibility.

Parents of children aged 5-18 were surveyed through YouGov's Parent Omnibus. The sample contained 4,245 adults overall, representative of adults in Great Britain. 2,404 parents, including 738 parents with children aged 5-18 in full time education completed the online survey between 14th-18th February 2020. Figures are based on the latter group unless otherwise indicated.

THE VIEW FROM SCHOOLS: PERCEPTIONS OF SEGREGATION

47% of those who work in state non-selective secondary schools agreed that socio-economic segregation is a problem in the comprehensive school system, with just 16% disagreeing.

Figure 2. Proportion of teachers agreeing that socio-economic segregation is a problem in the school system, by job role and level of school



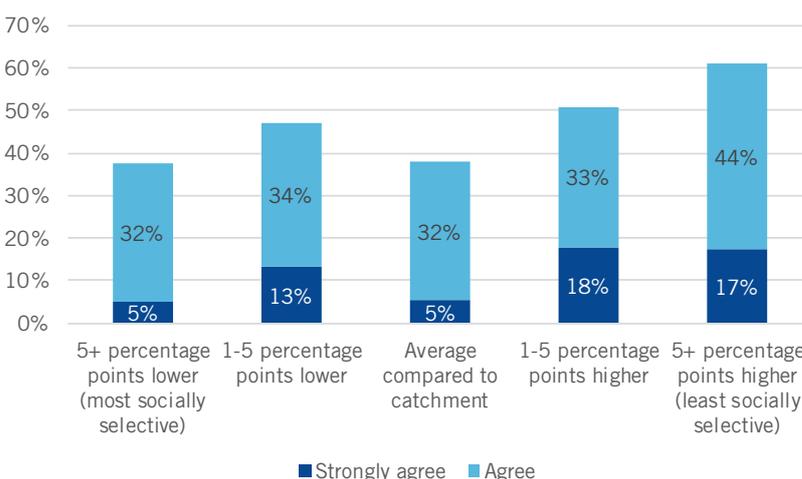
Senior leaders (50%) were more likely than classroom teachers (45%) to think so (Figure 2). Those who work in primary schools were less likely to say it's a problem, with 34% agreeing. Overall, 39% of respondents viewed socio-economic segregation as a problem. While primary schools are included here for context, the bulk of the analysis will focus on the problems facing secondary schools.

While teachers from schools with the lowest and highest levels of disadvantage showed very similar levels of agreement (54% in the lowest FSM quintile v 56% in the highest), there are substantial differences when selectivity compared to catchment area is taken into account.

Those who arguably suffer the most from a socially segregated system are more likely to recognise it as an issue, as Figure 3 shows. 61% of those teaching in the least socially selective schools agree that there is a problem, compared to 38% in the most socially selective schools. Similarly 60% of those in schools in the bottom fifth of attainment agreed, compared to 44% of those in the highest performing schools.

However, when it came to whether there was an issue with socio-economic segregation at their own school – as opposed to the school system as a whole – teachers were less likely to identify a problem. 68% of all senior leaders say there was no problem with segregation at their school, with 19% saying it would be better if their school

Figure 3. Proportion of teachers agreeing that socio-economic segregation is a problem in the school system, by social selectivity level of school



had fewer disadvantaged pupils, and just 6% saying it would be better if their schools had more. Those at primary schools were more likely than secondaries to feel there was no problem (Figure 4).

Perceptions of whether there is a problem differ substantially between schools which are socially selective and those which are not. While teachers at schools where disadvantaged backgrounds are over-represented are much more likely to say it would be better if their school had fewer disadvantaged pupils, those at schools where disadvantage is under-represented are unlikely to express that it would be better if their school took on more. Teachers in the most socially selective schools were most likely to say there was no issue with socio-economic segregation at their school (71%, see Figure 5).

Similar patterns exist if you look at overall levels of disadvantage in a school and the level of GCSE attainment (Figure 6). Those with the most disadvantaged pupils are most likely to want fewer disadvantaged pupils (44% v 2% with the lowest proportion). Similarly, schools with the lowest attainment were more likely to want fewer disadvantaged pupils (48% v 9% in the highest attaining). Lower disadvantage and higher attaining schools were more likely to be happy with the balance of their school.

Nonetheless, in the most advantaged, selective and highest attaining schools there were a small group of teachers (less than 10%) who believed it would be better if their schools took more disadvantaged pupils.

Perceptions of admissions

Teachers were asked, when deciding admissions policies, to what extent their school considers how its pupil intake reflects the socio-economic makeup of their local community (Figure 7). 38% of all senior leaders say they take the socio-economic makeup of their local community into account at least somewhat in their admissions policies. This is higher for secondary schools than primaries (48% v 33%). However,

Figure 4. Perception of socio-economic balance in own school, by job role and level of school

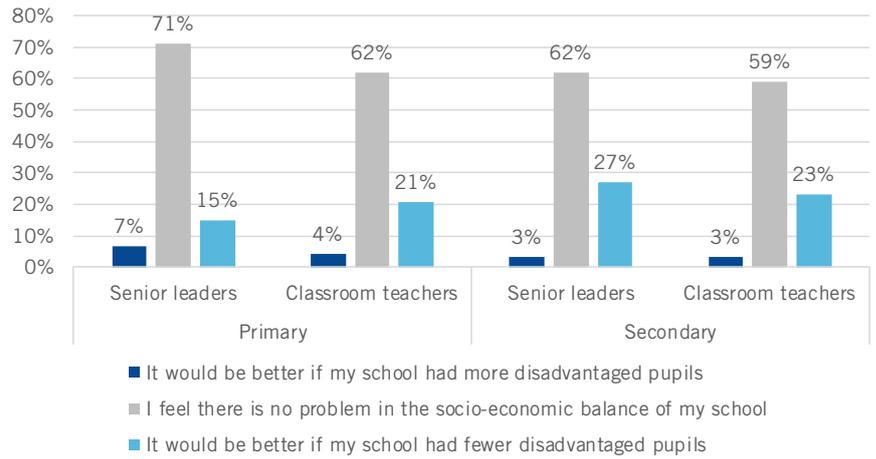


Figure 5. Perception of socio-economic balance in own school, by social selectivity level of school

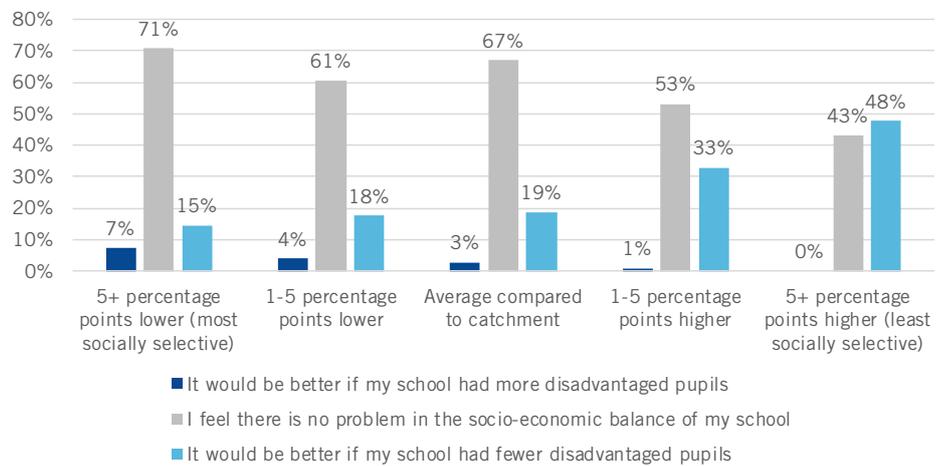
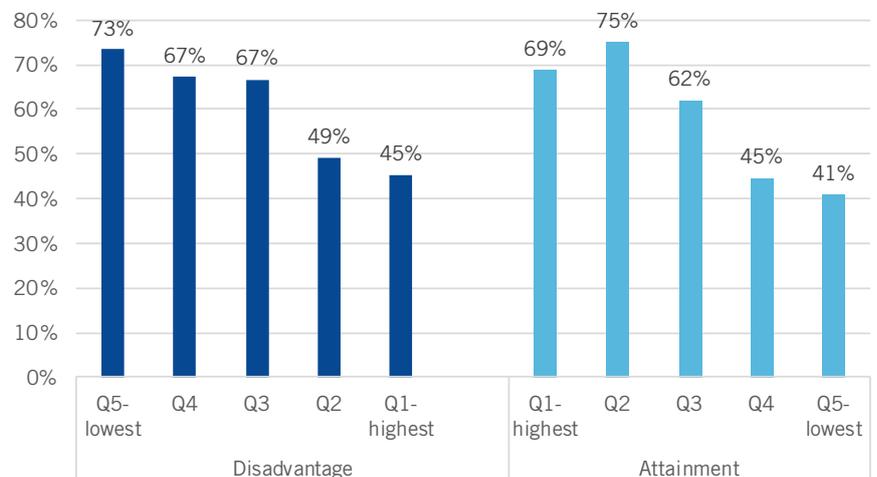


Figure 6. Proportion of those feeling there is no problem in the socio-economic balance of their school, by levels of disadvantage and attainment in the school



notably, 43% of all leaders say they don't take such factors into account 'at all'.

Differences between schools based on

attainment or level of disadvantage were not substantial, but nonetheless, schools with much higher rates of disadvantage compared to their community were more likely to take

socio-economic factors into account 'very strongly' (28% compared to 13% among those who were most socially selective, see Figure 8).

There were also differences among those at different types of schools (Figure 9). Just 11% of those at faith schools reported taking such issues very strongly into account, compared to 21% at local authority controlled schools. Such priorities are clearly reflected in admissions outcomes, with previous Sutton Trust research showing that faith schools are among the most likely to be highly socially selective.⁶ Academies that had voluntarily converted were also less likely to strongly take such factors into account. There were no substantive differences between single academies and those in multi-academy trusts.

Teachers were also asked about their awareness of social selectivity at their school (Figure 10). Those at secondary schools were more likely to say they take in more disadvantaged pupils than live in their local community. 50% of secondary leaders and 41% of teachers felt that they take a higher than average proportion of disadvantaged pupils from their local community. Just 7% overall in secondaries thought they take a lower rate, and 1% a much lower rate.

When comparing these perceptions to the profile of disadvantage, there was again a clear asymmetry in perceptions (Figure 11). 72% of teachers in schools which take a much higher rate of disadvantaged pupils than their neighbourhoods were aware of this. However just 11% of those in all socially selective schools were aware they take a lower rate of poorer students than their locality. About half of such teachers said they took about the average rate for their community, and 35% perceived that they took a *higher* rate. At the most selective schools, 74% of teachers thought their school took about the average or *higher* rates of disadvantage in their communities. There appears to be a lack of awareness of social selectivity in such schools. Patterns among senior leaders, who may have greater access to such information, were nonetheless similar. The picture was also replicated when looking at

Figure 7. Extent to which school leaders report that their school takes socio-economic makeup of local community into account when formulating admissions policies

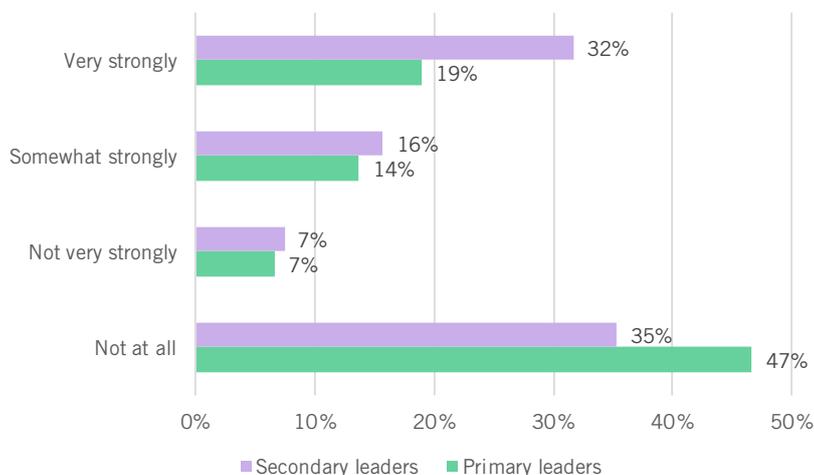


Figure 8. Proportion of teachers reporting their school takes socio-economic makeup of community into account, by social selectivity level of school

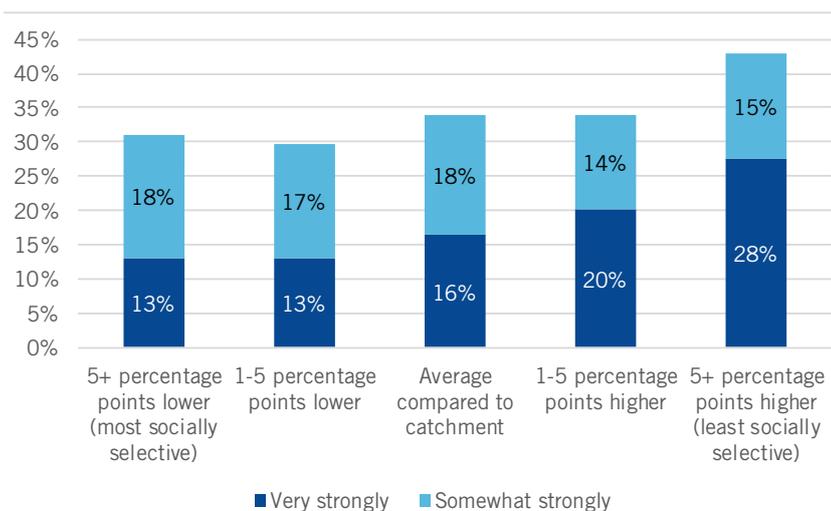


Figure 9. Proportion of teachers reporting their school takes socio-economic makeup of community into account, by school type

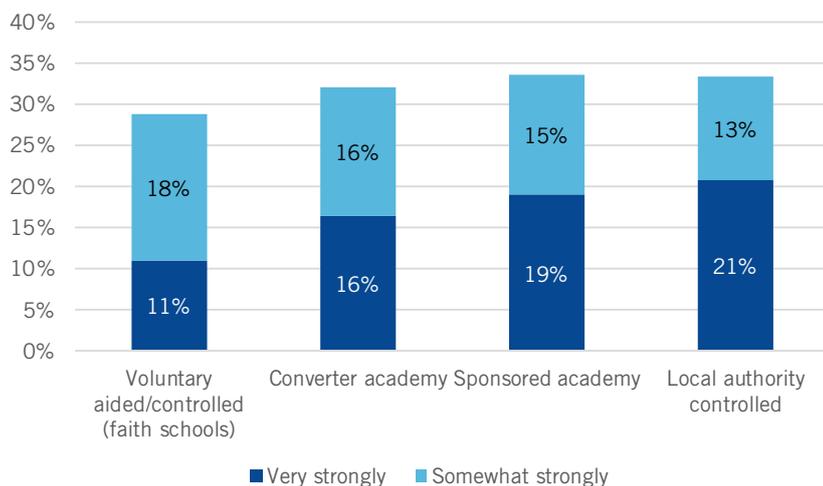


Figure 10. Perceptions of levels of disadvantage in school intakes compared to local community, by job role and level

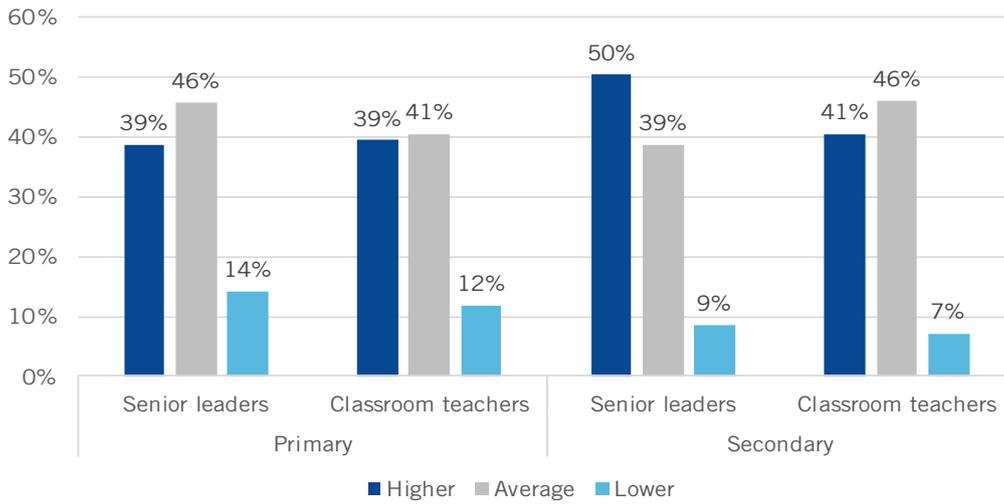


Figure 11. Perceptions of levels of disadvantage in school intakes compared to local community, by social selectivity level of school

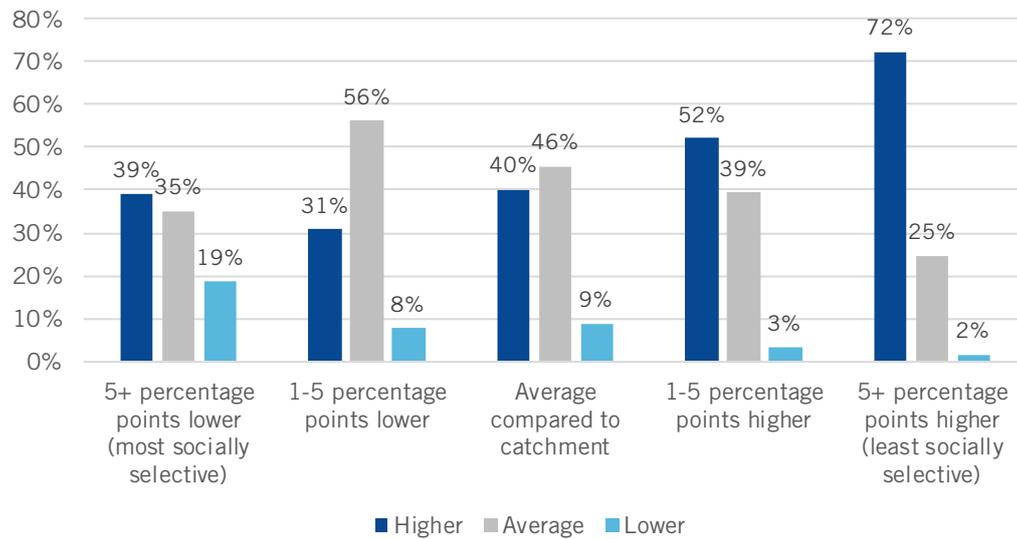
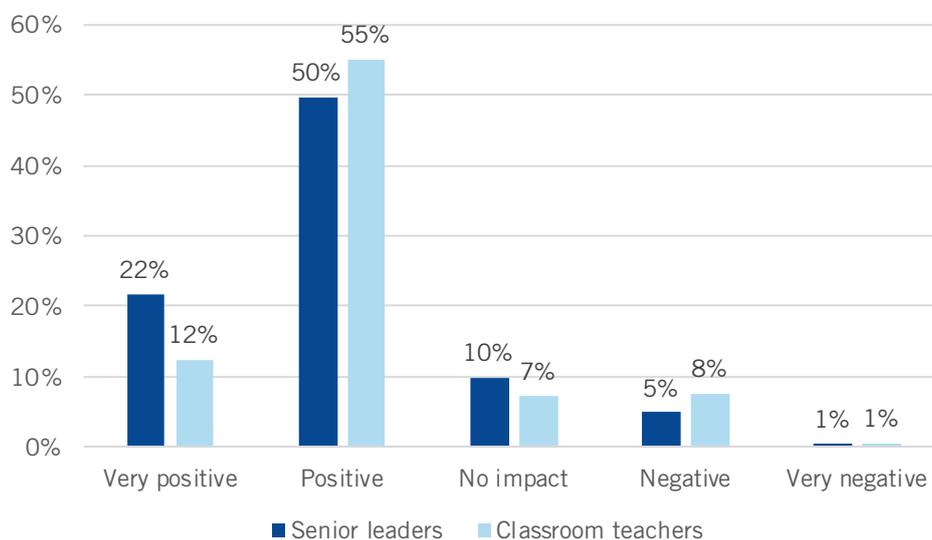


Figure 12. Potential impact of greater social mix in the school system, by job role



school type. In particular, while 14% of those at faith schools felt they took in lower levels of disadvantage than their local community, 45% perceived that they took in higher levels of disadvantage, despite such schools being the most socially selective in reality.

ADDRESSING THE PROBLEM

Despite these blindspots, respondents were very positive about the potential impact of addressing socio-economic segregation. 69% of teachers overall, and 71% of senior leaders, felt that reducing socio-economic segregation and improving social mix would have a positive effect in comprehensive schools (Figure 12). Just 16% thought it would have negative or no impact. This is a positive indicator for the prospect of change.

Those in the least socially selective schools were more likely to anticipate a positive effect (79%), and those in the most socially selective were most likely to say there would be negative or no impact (29%). Nonetheless, even at socially selective schools a clear majority of respondents said it would have a positive impact (61%).

A variety of factors were cited when it came to identifying the nature of that impact (Figure 13). Of those who felt there would be a positive impact, the largest group felt that greater social mix would improve social cohesion. But 63% also felt that greater social mixing would narrow the attainment gap between advantaged and disadvantaged pupils, including 72% of secondary senior leaders. Others felt it would have the effect of lessening the impact of pupil intakes on school league tables (45%) and help to spread teacher workload more evenly across different types of schools (37%).

While overall numbers citing benefits for teachers were relatively low, those in schools most likely to see the benefit were most likely to identify these factors. Teachers in schools with higher numbers of disadvantaged pupils, the lowest levels of social selection, and the lowest attainment were substantially more likely to cite the benefits of better teacher recruitment and

retention.

Figure 14 shows teacher perceptions of potential barriers to making such a change. The most commonly mentioned were class differences in parental preferences (54% of all secondary teachers) and the effect on league tables (48%). Housing segregation was cited as a significant barrier by 44%. Senior leaders were more likely than classroom teachers to cite external factors such as parental preferences and housing segregation than factors within a school's control. The school admissions code was least likely to be cited as a barrier (just 21%), demonstrating the potential for change without the need for government action.

Those in socially selective schools showed a broadly similar pattern to others, though were slightly less likely to cite league tables and slightly more likely to cite housing

segregation. In general, those in less socially selective schools, those with high FSM rates and lowest attaining schools were more likely to identify league table pressures than those in schools benefitting from more advantaged intakes.

Potential solutions

Socio-economic segregation in schools is a complex problem, and solutions are not necessarily straightforward. Changes to admissions policies create winners and losers, which makes change difficult. The Sutton Trust has looked at a variety of policy solutions over the years it has been considering this issue, and a variety are considered in detail in *School Places: A fair choice?*, accompanying this report. They include random ballots of a couple of different kinds, pupil premium prioritisation, banding, and simplified faith criteria.

Figure 13. Nature of potential positive impact of greater social mix

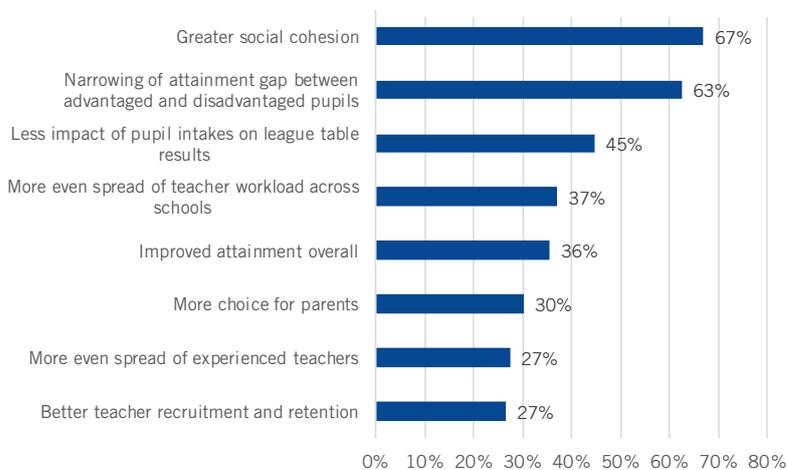
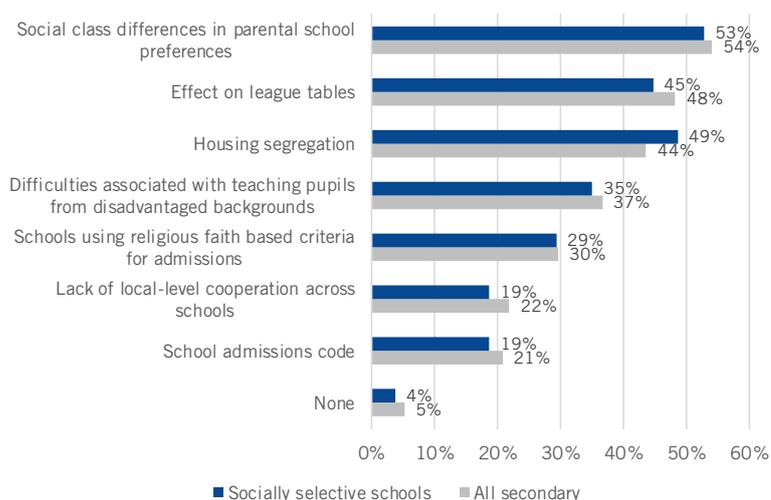


Figure 14. Perceived barriers to greater social mix at high performing schools social mix



OPTIONS FOR REFORM

RANDOM BALLOTS

Ballots are where eligible applicants are selected for admission at random using a lottery, meaning everyone has an equal chance of getting in. This could be done in a number of ways, including **50-50 ballots**, where half of places are reserved for those within a small catchment area, and the rest are open to a ballot within either a larger catchment area, or are unrestricted in terms of proximity. An alternative option is that of **'marginal lotteries'**, whereby most school places are allocated as normal, but a proportion of places, perhaps 10% or 20%, are reserved for applicants outside the catchment allocated by lottery.

PUPIL PREMIUM PRIORITY

Prioritising applicants eligible for the pupil premium is currently allowed under the school admissions code, and some schools are operating such policies. Again there are several ways of implementing this. The most far reaching would be to treat pupil premium applicants with strict priority, in the way looked after children are currently, meaning that all such applicants receive priority before other factors are taken into account. A less radical option would be to limit this **strict priority**, by capping the numbers of those admitted in such a way, to either the **national average of pupil premium eligibility**, or to the **proportion of pupil premium students in the local area** of the school (catchment area or local authority proportion). If a school was oversubscribed with pupil premium applicants, then a lottery would be used. All other places could be allocated as normal.

BANDING

Banding tests are currently used by a number of schools. Pupils sit an entrance test, but rather than allocating places based on ability, places are allocated equally across all ability 'bands'. This means a balance of abilities are admitted, which is likely to have a knock on effect on socio-economic background.

LESS COMPLEX CONDITIONS FOR DEMONSTRATING RELIGIOUS OBSERVANCE

Sutton Trust research has consistently shown that faith schools are among the most socially selective schools. This arises from the often complex eligibility criteria set out by such schools, which those from more well-off homes may be better equipped and more motivated to navigate. Such complex criteria can often reveal information about the social background of the family to the school and could enable 'covert selection'.⁷ One way of addressing this would be to work with religious communities to simplify the process, by establishing a binary criteria of religious adherence, approved by a relevant religious leader, so avoiding the need for schools to collect information on family background.

Teachers were offered this list of policies and asked which they thought were most likely to be adopted by the type of oversubscribed schools who are currently socially selective (Figure 15).

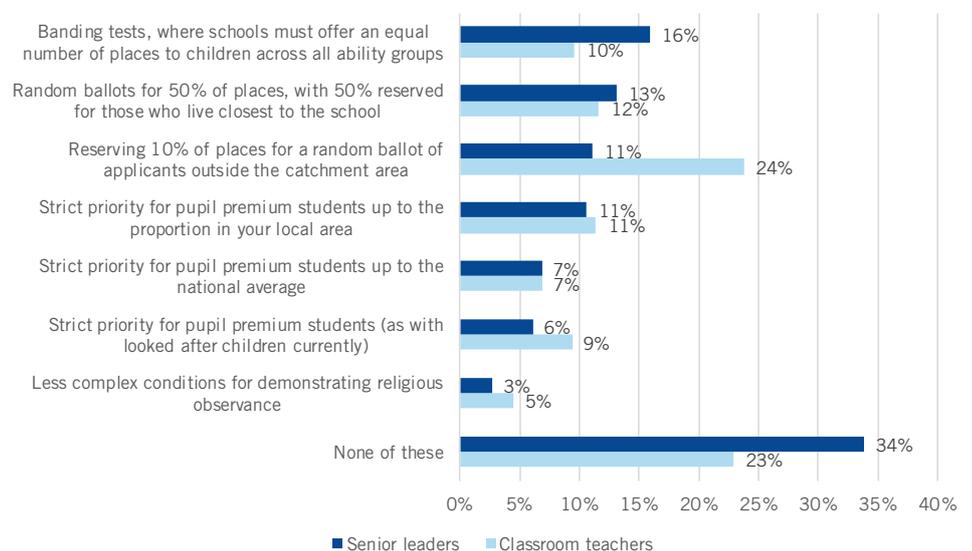
Secondary leaders were most likely to suggest banding tests as a solution that could be adopted by such schools (16%). However, classroom teachers were much more likely to cite the idea of 10% marginal ballots. 50-50 ballots were also high on the list for both groups (13% of senior leaders). Among the pupil premium prioritisation strategies, capping the level of priority based on levels of disadvantage in the local area was most popular. Around a quarter of respondents suggested some form of prioritisation as a likely option. Nonetheless, the most popular option amongst senior leaders was 'none of these' (34%), indicating the scale of the challenge in persuading schools to reform their admissions policies – and the challenge in finding practical

steps that can lead to change. Nonetheless, those in socially selective, high attaining schools were not more pessimistic compared to those in other types of school. Those in such schools were slightly more open to ideas around pupil premium priority than average, but the most

popular option was also 10% marginal ballots.

Despite these challenges, many respondents were open to change. Almost two thirds (62%) of secondary leaders were open to conducting a 'fair admissions review' of their

Figure 15. Which policies are most likely to be adopted by oversubscribed schools, by job role



policies, and 50% of primary leaders. A majority of teachers in high attaining, socially selective schools were also open to a fair admissions review (53%), and only slightly less than those in the least socially selective schools.

THE VIEW FROM PARENTS: POTENTIAL FOR REFORM

Parents are a key element of the school choice system, and their attitudes are crucial for achieving change. In a survey, parents were given a variety of attitudinal statements on comprehensive school admissions, and asked if they agreed or disagreed (Figure 16). Overwhelming majorities of parents agreed that schools should have a mix of students from different social backgrounds (80%) and importantly, that school intakes should reflect the makeup of their local community (76%). 69% of parents also believed that high achieving schools should make an effort to take in more pupils from less well-off backgrounds. On the other side, almost half (48%) disagreed with the statement that who gets in should be about how much effort that parents make, and 51% disagreed with the idea that pupils are best schooled alongside pupils from families like themselves. It is clear that parents have a sense of fairness when it comes to the principles underlying school admissions, though as we shall see, this can conflict with the perceived interests of their own child.

Parents of school age children were asked to consider the scenario of a popular, oversubscribed comprehensive. They were asked, once those with special educational needs and elder siblings had been taken into account, which would be the fairest way of allocating places. 39% of parents opted for some form of random allocation via a ballot; 23% for balloting all places and 16% balloting for half, with the remaining half going to those living within a certain distance. 46% preferred that all places be allocated to those within a certain distance. Perhaps surprisingly, middle class parents (ABC1) were more likely to recommend one of the ballot options (42%). Less surprisingly, those living in urban locations were more

Figure 16. Parental attitudes to statements about school admissions (all parents)

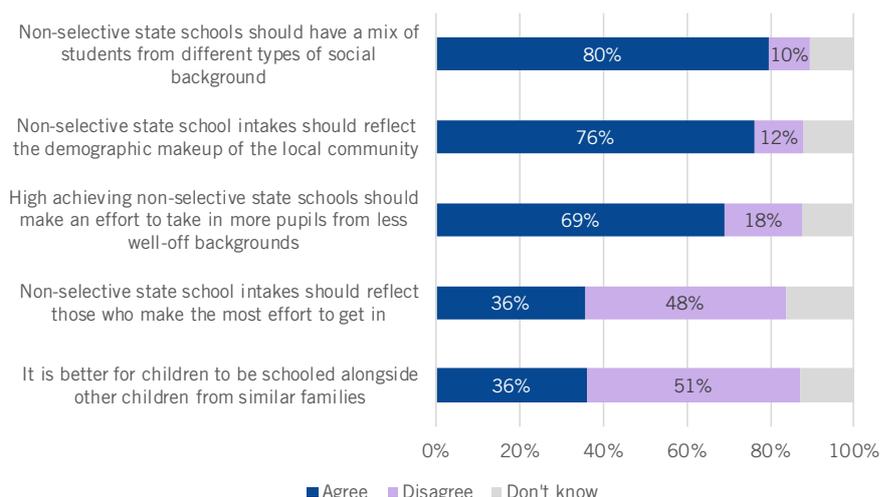
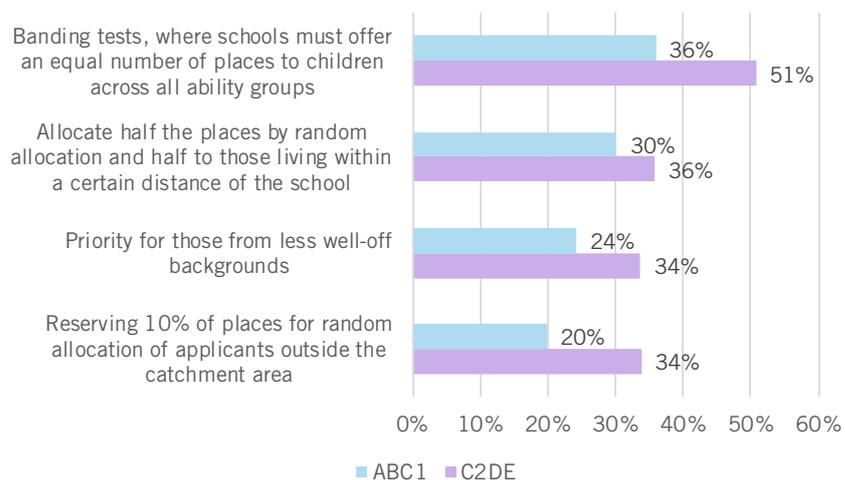


Figure 17. Proportion who would feel positive about admissions policy change, parents of children attending non-selective state schools



likely to be in favour of ballots than those in rural or semi-urban settings. This underlines that proximity is key to those living in areas of lower population density due to travel times, and ballots are much easier to implement in high-density urban settings.

Parents of children attending non-selective state schools were then asked to consider how they would feel if their school (or the school they were planning to attend) introduced a variety of admissions policies (Figure 17). Banding was the most popular, at 42% overall, followed by allocating half of places randomly. 10% marginal ballots and prioritisation were less popular. Overall, parents in working class occupations (C2DE) were more likely to welcome change than those in middle class

occupations, perhaps reflecting the relative differences in the stake each group holds in the current system.

DISCUSSION

These findings paint a complex picture of attitudes to admissions and socio-economic segregation among teachers and parents. There is a wide-ranging recognition among schools that segregation is a problem within the comprehensive system, and that addressing that problem is likely to have a positive impact on the system as a whole. Furthermore, parents strongly endorse a variety of ideas around fairness in admissions and the principle that school intakes should reflect their local communities.

However, a substantial proportion of schools clearly do not take socio-economic issues into account when

designing their admissions policies. This appears to have a tangible impact on admissions. Schools less likely to do so are more likely to end up with socially selective intakes that do not reflect their local community. As a first step, it is vital that schools actively consider the impact of their admissions policies on those from disadvantaged backgrounds, particularly among schools who have lower levels of disadvantage, many of whom perform strongly in terms of attainment. While many in such schools believe that it is parental choice that plays the biggest role in segregation, the evidence from research on parental choices does not bear this out.⁸

As discussed in more detail in the accompanying paper on options for reform, it matters which school a child attends. And the current socio-economic divide in admissions underpins many of the inequalities that continue to be a feature of the education system, from unequal access to the best teaching, to large discrepancies in progression to top universities. It is welcome that those who work in schools are clear that addressing social segregation can have a positive impact on pupils, teachers and schools across the spectrum.

Nonetheless, the challenges involved should not be underestimated. The school accountability system, through league tables and Ofsted, rewards schools with more advantaged intakes.⁹ Though the introduction of pupil premium funding and the switch from raw attainment scores to measuring progress in school league tables have gone some way towards rebalancing those incentives. Nonetheless, parents, in particular middle class parents, also have a stake in the continuation of the current system. As Sutton Trust research has shown, many have gone to substantial lengths to access what they regard as good schools for their children, from buying houses within catchment areas to attending church services for the purpose of accessing a place in a faith school.¹⁰

This report demonstrates that this vested interest is buttressed by cognitive biases. Those working

in schools with low numbers of disadvantaged students, and whose intakes are more advantaged than their local communities are unlikely to recognise this fact. Many of them actually perceive that their intakes are more disadvantaged than the local community. These attitudes are held both by classroom teachers, and school leaders who have knowledge and influence of admissions processes. This lack of awareness presents a challenge for addressing this issue, but highlights the potential impact of making such data available to decision makers in schools, including governing bodies. Nonetheless, the extent of schools' willingness to conduct a 'fair admissions review' is encouraging in this regard. Such a review could help reveal socio-economic gaps in who applies and who is accepted.

Another challenge is posed by the disconnect between abstract views on fairness, and views on tangible policy change. Large numbers of teachers and parents endorse ideas around fair admissions, yet are less positive when presented with concrete changes in policy that could help bring about a fairer system. This is natural and understandable. As with access to university, a situation with limited places at institutions where demand outstrips supply means there are winners and losers from any one approach to allocation. Policy change inevitably disrupts those patterns. But it is the strong view of the Sutton Trust, that despite short term disruption, that fairer school admissions, and a greater social mix across the school system, would have benefits to schools across the spectrum. It has the potential to dilute the impact of socio-economic background on schools, both operationally and in terms of reputation and outcomes, impacting positively on teacher recruitment and retention, and the options open to parents when choosing a school. Schools better reflecting the makeup of their local communities also can have a positive impact on social cohesion in the school system.

It is vital that we build on the consensus around principles of fairness to make the case for reform. The Sutton Trust, over the course of 2020 and beyond hopes to do just

that, consulting with schools, parents, government and other stakeholders to explore how we can make the system of school choice work for everyone.

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