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Admissions policies to secondary schools in England: Facilitating mixed intakes

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Outline

- Historical context
- Market-oriented reforms
- Admissions
- Banding
- Random allocation
- Prioritising disadvantaged pupils
- Examples of policies at school level



Historical context

- From 1944 secondary school system academically selective – grammar, technical and secondary modern schools
- From 1965 – move towards comprehensive system (one school type for all)
- 1972 – Inner London Education Authority introduced area-wide banding to try and ensure comprehensive intakes
 - Involved pupils being placed in ability bands on the basis of test scores
 - Places were then offered to pupils from each of the ability bands in each school
- 1988 – Education Reform Act abolished ILEA: banding continued in some inner London authorities (see West, 2005; West, 2006)



Market reforms

- Conservative government: 1980 Education Act and 1988 Education Reform resulted in introduction of market principles into school-based education
- Some schools with more autonomy changed admissions policies to maximise their league table position (e.g. selecting some pupils because of 'aptitude' in a subject)
- Labour government: concerns led to tightening up school admissions (1998 School Standards and Framework Act) and attempts to make the process clearer and fairer
- School admissions code introduced in 1999 – guidance regarding school admissions – along with schools adjudicator (see West et al., 2011)



Admissions to schools

- Parents express a minimum of three ‘choices’ (preferences) for publicly-funded secondary schools
- Allocation to schools is undertaken by either the local authority or the individual school
- The decision to admit a pupil is based on published admissions criteria taking into account parents’ preferences
- Admissions policies can also include banding and random allocation (West et al., 2011)



Main admissions criteria (2012)

(Noden et al., 2014)

Admissions criteria/policies	% of secondary schools (N=2837)
Child in care of the local authority	100
Child has sibling at the school	97
Distance between child's home and school	93
Child has special educational needs	68
Child lives in school's catchment area	64
Child has medical/social needs	55
Religion/religious denomination	16
Partial selection by ability/aptitude in subject	6
School uses banding	4
School uses random allocation across zone/area	2



Pupil ability banding

- Pupil ability banding is a permitted form of selection used by some admission authorities to ensure that the intake for a school includes a proportionate spread of children of different abilities. Banding can be used to produce an intake that is representative of:
 - a) the full range of ability of applicants for the school(s);
 - b) the range of ability of children in the local area; or c) the national ability range.
- Admission authorities' entry requirements for banding must be fair, clear and objective...
- The admission authority must publish the admission requirements and the process for such banding ...(DfE, 2014)



Random allocation

- Random allocation of school places can be good practice particularly for urban areas and secondary schools... It may be used as the sole means of allocating places or alongside other oversubscription criteria. Random allocation can widen access to schools for those unable to afford to buy houses near to favoured schools and create greater social equity (DfES, 2007)
- Random allocation is no longer recommended but can be used (DfE, 2014)



Prioritising disadvantaged pupils

- The pupil premium grant is funding provided to schools in addition to the normal school budget that ‘follows’ children eligible for free school meals (on low incomes and in receipt of specified state benefits)
- It is designed to support the attainment of disadvantaged children (DfE, 2014)
- Some schools prioritise children eligible for the pupil premium as part of the admissions process



School using banding

- The school has adopted the local authority's policy of banding. The available 240 places are divided equally across the four bands of ability
- Children with statement of special educational needs naming school (place will be provided in appropriate band)
- 12 places (3 in each band) allocated to children with aptitude in music
- Children looked after by local authority
- Children with strong social/medical need
- Children living nearest the school who are eldest in child in family (25% of each band)
- Children whose older brother or sister attend the school
- Children who live nearest the school as measured by the shortest walking route (Tower Hamlets, 2014)



Academy using random allocation

- Pupils with a statement of special educational needs...
- Criteria will be applied in the following order.
- 1 Looked After Children.
- 2 Admission of pupils whose siblings attend the Academy in Year 7–10 and who will continue to do so on the date of admission.
- 3 Remaining places in each ability band will be allocated by drawing lots in geographical zones. Zone A will be a zone up to a 2 mile radius from the fixed point shown on display at the Academy and on the website...Zone B will be a zone over 2 miles' radius from the point on the map
- (90% of places will be allocated to Zone A and 10% to Zone B) (see Noden et al., 2014)



Academy: banding, random

- 1 Children in public care will be offered a place
- 2 Children with a statement of special educational needs...governors may grant a place to a child with a very exceptional medical or social need on the recommendation of an independent professional
- 3 Children whose siblings at the time of application [in specific year groups] at the Academy
- 4 65% of the remaining places will then be offered to: (i) an inner catchment area which will include all addresses in post code zone [postcode x]. If there is oversubscription, the Academy will offer places using fair banding and random selection to ensure all abilities are represented.... (ii) The remaining 35% of places will be offered to an outer catchment area which will include all addresses in the post code zones [postcodes y, z]. If there is oversubscription, the Academy will offer places using fair banding



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