



**Evidence for
Excellence in
Education**

A Guide to the Evidence on Academies

**National Foundation for Educational
Research (NFER)**



Introduction

Academy schools are a prominent feature of the educational landscape in England. Introduced in 2002, they are funded directly from central government and have become a major policy driver to reform the school system and increase educational attainment. Academies account for 60 per cent of secondary schools and 13 per cent of primaries.¹

This report presents the findings from a rapid review of evidence on the performance of academy schools. It is based on 13 key studies which are summarised at the end of this guide. The purpose of the review is to make a contribution to understanding current research on academies with a view to identifying gaps and drawing conclusions. It is published as part of a series which will include:

- A **think piece** arguing that any future expansion in the number of academies should be motivated by a clear vision as to what long-term outcomes for learners academy policy is aiming to achieve.
- New **survey data** exploring parents' knowledge about academy schools and the extent to which they would like more information.
- An authoritative **factsheet**.
- **Summaries** of the 13 key studies reviewed for this guide.²

Academy performance is complex

The evidence reviewed reveals that the overall picture of academy performance is complex. It is difficult to provide a comprehensive assessment owing to differences between:

- the funding and purpose of early academies (2002-2009) and later academies established from 2010 onwards
- pupil intakes and profile of converter³ and sponsored⁴ academies

¹ Ofsted (2014). *The Report of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills 2013/14* [online]. Available: https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/384707/Ofsted_Annual_Report_201314_Schools.pdf [28 April, 2015].

² All documents will be available from www.nfer.ac.uk/academies

- primary and secondary academies
- academies in different academy chains.

Consequently, it would be simplistic and misleading to draw firm conclusions and make a singular assessment of academies as a whole.

There is no conclusive evidence of the impact of academy status on attainment in **primary schools** (GB. Parliament. HoC. Education Committee, 2015).

There is some evidence that **sponsored secondary academies** have had a positive effect on pupil performance:

- Attainment progress between Key Stage 2 and Key Stage 4 outcomes was higher after two years in 2013 compared to similar schools (Worth, 2014).
- GCSE results, including for pupils eligible for free school meals and those with special educational needs, improved at a faster rate 2009-2011 compared with the results in similar schools. On average, academies which had been open the longest had better results (DfE, 2012).
- GCSE results of disadvantaged pupils, including English and mathematics, improved 2011-2013, though there was considerable variation between academy chains (Hutchings *et al.*, 2014).

Furthermore, Ofsted inspection ratings were more likely to increase in schools that became sponsored academies 2002-2009 which corroborated Key Stage 4 performance gains (Eyles and Machin, 2014).

There is far less research on the performance of **converter academies** (created after 2010). There was no significant difference in attainment progress between Key Stage 2 and Key Stage 4 outcomes after two years between converter academies and similar non-academy schools in 2013, although ceiling effects

³ A converter academy is a formerly maintained school that has voluntarily converted to academy status and does not necessarily have a sponsor.

⁴ A sponsored academy is a formerly underperforming maintained school that has been transformed to academy status as part of a government intervention strategy, and is run by a government-approved sponsor.

could limit the extent to which differences between these higher performing schools can be observed (Worth, 2014).

Few studies look at the impact academies have on other schools around them

None of the studies we reviewed identified a quantitative impact of academies on other local schools. Previous research has found that academies can generate external benefits on neighbouring schools.⁵ However, in the studies we looked at, a majority of converter and sponsored academies report that they give support to other schools, and secondary academies, larger academies and converter academies are more likely to do this. Support included joint practice development, running training courses, developing middle leadership and boosting senior leadership capacity (Cirin, 2014).

Few studies investigate parents' knowledge of academies

The review found no evidence relating to parents' knowledge of academies or the availability of relevant information for them to use. The longer sponsored and converter academies have been open, the more likely they are to say that they have experienced an increase in first-choice applications (Cirin, 2014). Another source found that a third of respondents reported an increased demand for school places since becoming sponsored or converter academies (Finch *et al.*, 2014). The Education Select Committee identified concerns that the voice of parents can be marginalised in some academies (GB. Parliament. HoC. Education Committee, 2015).

Recommendations for future research

Lessons for future policy could be gained through further research into academies, exploring for example:

- The performance of secondary academies over a longer timeframe (e.g. five years or more), and of primary academies, including a comparison with non-academy schools with similar characteristics, and their impact on different pupil groups.

⁵ Machin, S and Venoit, J. (2011). *Changing School Autonomy: Academy Schools and their Introduction*. London: LSE. [online]. Available: <http://cee.lse.ac.uk/ceedps/ceedp123.pdf> [28 April, 2015].

- Investigating the factors that significantly affect performance, in order to understand the mechanisms underlying the policy (many of which continue to be areas of active policy interest – for example, leadership, accountability and governance, collaboration, and membership of academy groupings such as chains (see our accompanying think piece for a more detailed discussion of this issue).
- The extent to which the academies programme has increased competition between schools, and the impact this has had on overall performance across the system.
- Views of parents on the quality of education experienced by their children, and exploring the extent to which school choice and local accountability are present and a driver of improvement in the current system.

Methodology

We used a consistent, best-evidence approach to the selection of literature. The parameters for the review were work published in English between 2010 and 2015 about primary or secondary schools (pupils aged four to 18) in England. Study types included empirical research and/or evaluation, published literature and policy documents. We devised a search strategy which involved using a number of electronic databases, relevant websites and reference lists of previous reviews. We filtered the search results, so that only the most relevant and best-quality studies were included within the review. We then appraised the full text of 13 items of literature using a template and drew on all of these in writing our review.

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| Report | Coverage of evidence | | | Type of academy | | |
|--|--------------------------------------|---|--|---------------------|---------------------|-----------------------|
| | Do academies achieve better results? | What impact do academies have on other schools? | How do parents know if an academy provides a good education? | Converter academies | Sponsored academies | Other types of school |
| <u>Unleashing Greatness....</u> (Academies Commission, 2013) | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| <u>A Study of the Impact of School Federation on Student Outcomes</u> (Chapman <i>et al.</i> , 2011) | ✓ | ✓ | | | | ✓ |
| <u>Academies and Maintained Schools....</u> (NAO, 2014) | | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| <u>Do Academies Make Use of Their Autonomy?</u> (Cirin, 2014) | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | |
| <u>Attainment at Key Stage 4 by Pupils in Academies</u> (DfE, 2012) | ✓ | | | | ✓ | |
| <u>Academies and Free Schools</u> (GB. Parliament. HoC. Education Committee, 2015) | ✓ | ✓ | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| <u>The Introduction of Academy Schools to England's Education</u> (Eyles & Machin, 2014) | ✓ | | | ✓ | | |
| <u>Plan A+ 2014....</u> (Finch <i>et al.</i> , 2014) | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | |
| <u>The Link between Academies in England...</u> (Gorard, 2014) | ✓ | ✓ | | ✓ | ✓ | |
| <u>Chain Effects....</u> (Hutchings <i>et al.</i> , 2014) | ✓ | | | | ✓ | |
| <u>Balancing Freedom and Fairness....</u> (Thomson, 2013) | ✓ | | | ✓ | ✓ | |
| <u>Are England's Academies More Inclusive or More 'Exclusive'?</u> (Wilson, 2011) | ✓ | | | | ✓ | |
| <u>Analysis of Academy School Performance in GCSEs 2013</u> (Worth, 2014) | ✓ | | | ✓ | ✓ | |

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|-----------------------------|---|------------------------|------------------------------------|
| Title: | <i>Unleashing Greatness: Getting the Best from an Academised System. The Report of the Academies Commission</i> | Author(s): | Academies Commission (2013) |
| Aims: | RSA Commission which aimed to explore what the education landscape would look like with all or most schools academised | | |
| Coverage of evidence | | Type of academy | |
| ✓ | Do academies achieve better results? | ✓ | Converter academies |
| ✓ | What impact do academies have on other schools? | ✓ | Sponsored academies |
| ✓ | How do parents know if an academy provides a good education? | ✓ | Other |
| Key findings | <p>Do academies achieve better results? The Commission identifies that the purpose of sponsored academies and converter academies is different and warns that ‘there are, therefore, problems in looking to the academy programme before 2010 to learn lessons for the future’ (p. 25). Looking at international evidence on US charter schools and Swedish <i>friskolor</i>, the Commission finds that charter schools seem to perform better than standard public schools in US urban areas, and <i>friskolor</i> have a modest positive impact, although the evidence is mixed. The Commission concludes that academy status alone is not a panacea for improvement.</p> <p>Impact of academies on other schools The Commission finds that not all converter academies are fulfilling the commitment they make when converting, which concerns supporting other schools to improve. In order to continue a school-led improvement drive, this commitment needs to be kept, and the Commission recommends ‘that Ofsted should not judge a school to be ‘outstanding’ for leadership unless it can provide evidence of its contribution to system-wide improvement, such as support for the improvement of another school’ (p. 6). It also makes recommendations under this heading for local authorities to take on a new role as ‘champions for children’, scrutinising local provision and playing a leading part in the planning and commissioning of school places (p. 11).</p> <p>How do parents know? This area was not a feature of the Commission’s report. However, one submission of evidence stated that ‘...not all parents are able to exercise choice on behalf of their children or lack access to information to do so’ and the Commission sees the need for a ‘corporate parent’ to act on behalf of young people (p. 96). It recommends that an annual report produced by the local authority on the quality of education provided in the local area would be of use to parents and the local community.</p> | | |
| Methodology | A ‘speed commission’ methodology was used, involving evidence gathered from written submissions, expert witnesses and qualitative data. Those providing evidence included: 28 organisations and 34 individuals who submitted written evidence in response to a call for evidence; 64 witness statements; two focus groups; 18 ‘meetings and workshops’; a survey to Teach First ambassadors (43 survey respondents and two telephone interviews); a survey to Teach First teachers (477 responses to a survey at a Teach First event). | | |
| Full reference | Academies Commission (2013). <i>Unleashing Greatness: Getting the Best from an Academised System. The Report of the Academies Commission</i> [online]. Available: http://www.thersa.org/_data/assets/pdf_file/0020/1008038/Unleashing-greatness.pdf [28 April, 2015]. | | |

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| Title: <i>A Study of the Impact of School Federation on Student Outcomes</i> Author(s): Chapman <i>et al.</i> (2011) | |
| Aims: | Academic study to determine the impact of federation and collaboration arrangements on student outcomes, leadership, management and efficiency |
| Coverage of evidence | Type of academy |
| ✓ Do academies achieve better results? | Converter academies |
| ✓ What impact do academies have on other schools? | Sponsored academies |
| How do parents know if an academy provides a good education? | ✓ Other |
| Key findings | <p>The researchers categorise six broad types of federation: ‘size federations’ (where one or more small schools partner), ‘performance federations’ (where a high-performing school partners one or more low-performing schools), ‘faith federations’ (where schools from a similar faith background combine), ‘cross-phase federations’ (primary and secondary, first and middle, middle and high, or first, middle and high schools forming a federation across school phases), ‘mainstreaming federations’ (one or more mainstream schools partner a special school), and ‘academy federations’ (academies with the same sponsor form a federation).</p> <p>The study finds that federation schools start to outperform non-federation after approximately two to four years, at both primary and secondary level. The impact of federation was greater than that of collaboration at secondary level, but there were no significant differences between the two at primary level.</p> <p>The research concludes that strong leadership is a key feature of successful federations. Considerable variations were found in the leadership and management structures of federations. This study finds that secondary federations with executive leadership outperform federations with traditional leadership structures (one headteacher leading one school).</p> |
| Methodology | Quantitative analysis involving multilevel modelling (secondary sample: 73 federation schools across 28 federations, and 73 control schools. Primary sample: 176 federation schools across 73 federations, and 176 control schools). Control schools were determined using propensity score matching. In total, 7.4 per cent of the sample were academies. There was also a small qualitative strand comprising five case studies schools. |
| Full reference | Chapman, C., Mujs, D. and MacAllister, J. (2011). <i>A Study of the Impact of School Federation on Student Outcomes</i> [online]. Available: http://dera.ioe.ac.uk/12140/ [28 April, 2015]. |

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| Title: <i>Academies and Maintained Schools: Oversight and Intervention</i> | | Author(s): National Audit Office (2014) | |
| Aims: | This study by the National Audit Office (NAO) set out to evaluate the oversight and intervention system for schools | | |
| Coverage of evidence | | Type of academy | |
| | Do academies achieve better results? | ✓ | Converter academies |
| | What impact do academies have on other schools? | ✓ | Sponsored academies |
| ✓ | How do parents know if an academy provides a good education? | ✓ | Other |
| Key findings | <p>This audit finds that the DFE has been clear about what constitutes unacceptable performance and that all local authorities and 95 per cent of multi-academy trusts are likely to intervene in schools that Ofsted rated ‘inadequate’, or where results were below the floor standard.</p> <p>In terms of governance, the audit concludes that the DFE has not clearly articulated some of the roles and responsibilities of external bodies. Specifically it reports that, in light of the increasing diversity of the school system and significant changes to oversight bodies’ responsibilities and the introduction of new bodies (academy trusts and sponsors), there has been some confusion about oversight of safeguarding; the responsibilities of academy sponsors; and the role of local authorities in relation to academies. The NAO recommends that the DFE improve its understanding of the quality of school governance.</p> <p>The NAO criticises the DFE for not having done enough to evaluate the effectiveness of the different interventions it and others make, so it does not know which are cost-effective. In particular the report identifies that the DFE does not yet know why some academy sponsors are more successful than others and does not routinely collect information from sponsors on the types of support they give to schools. It highlights that Ofsted is not able to inspect academy sponsors or multi-academy trusts so there is no independent source of information about the quality of their work. The report recommends that the DFE ensure that it has an independent source of information for assessing the quality, capacity and performance of academy sponsors.</p> | | |
| Methodology | Audit report analysing findings from data assurance and DfE operational assessments. The report reviewed data available to DfE and its partners including Ofsted reports, surveys of local authorities and multi-academy trusts. It examined the legislative powers available to oversight bodies and analysed the impact of interventions. It also included primary data in the form of case studies of schools, and interviews with DfE staff, its partners and other stakeholders. | | |
| Full reference | National Audit Office (2014). <i>Academies and Maintained Schools: Oversight and Intervention</i> (HC 721) [online]. Available: http://www.nao.org.uk/report/academies-and-maintained-schools-oversight-and-intervention/ [28 April, 2015]. | | |

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|-----------------------------|---|------------------------|---------------------|
| Title: | <i>Do Academies Make Use of Their Autonomy?</i> | Author(s): | Cirin (2014) |
| Aims: | DFE commissioned research which aims to explore the reasons for schools becoming academies, the changes they have made since conversion and the perceived impact of these changes | | |
| Coverage of evidence | | Type of academy | |
| ✓ | Do academies achieve better results? | ✓ | Converter academies |
| ✓ | What impact do academies have on other schools? | ✓ | Sponsored academies |
| ✓ | How do parents know if an academy provides a good education? | | Other |
| Key findings | <p>The most common reasons cited for conversion were to gain more funding and greater autonomy over its use, and to raise educational standards. The most commonly-made changes were the procurement of services formerly supplied by the LA from alternative sources; changes made (or planned to be made) to the curriculum; and the formalisation of collaboration arrangements.</p> <p>Do academies achieve better results? Two-thirds of academies believe the changes they have made have improved attainment. This is especially the case for sponsored academies. The longer an academy has been open, the more likely they are to say the changes have substantially improved attainment. Increased collaboration, changes to the curriculum and school leadership were felt to have led to the biggest improvements in academies. Changes in leadership were seen as important especially in sponsored academies.</p> <p>Impact of academies on other schools? Nine out of ten converter academies and seven out of ten sponsored academies reported that they give support to other schools, many of whom said that before converting they did not do this. The most common types of support were joint practice development, running CPD courses, developing middle leadership and boosting senior leadership capacity. Multi-academy trusts (MATs) often offer those types of support, but not only to schools within their own MAT. This suggests that MATs are not working in isolation from the rest of the local school system, and are actively working together to lead school improvement.</p> <p>How do parents know? The research finds that the longer an academy has been open, the more likely it is to say that it has experienced an increase in first choice applications.</p> | | |
| Methodology | <p>Online survey of 720 academies (148 and 572 converter). This represented a 25 per cent response rate (all academies that had been open on 1 May 2013 received the survey in February 2014). The sample was representative of the overall academy population. It is important to note that the analysis shows where there are correlations between becoming academies and subsequent outcomes, rather than proven causation. Findings are based on academy respondents' own perceptions; a planned comparison group of non-academies achieved too low a sample size to be included in reporting.</p> | | |
| Full reference | <p>Cirin, R. (2014). <i>Do Academies Make Use of Their Autonomy?</i> (DfE Research Report 366) [online]. Available: https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/326163/RR366_-_research_report_academy_autonomy_Final.pdf [28 April, 2015].</p> | | |

| Title: <i>Attainment at Key Stage 4 by Pupils in Academies 2011</i> | | Author(s): Department for Education (2012) | |
|---|--|--|---------------------|
| Aims: | A DFE analysis of the performance at the end of KS4 of pupils who were in academies during the academic year 2010/11. | | |
| Coverage of evidence | | Type of academy | |
| ✓ | Do academies achieve better results? | | Converter academies |
| | What impact do academies have on other schools? | ✓ | Sponsored academies |
| | How do parents know if an academy provides a good education? | | Other |
| Key findings | <p>Between 2009/10 and 2010/11, results in sponsored academies were on average lower than in all state-funded schools, but they were improving at a faster rate. In all comparisons, academies' results improved faster than in 'similar' schools including for FSM and SEN pupils.</p> <p>Using a sub-set of sponsored academies which had been open for several years enabled performance to be viewed over a longer time series. The research finds that between 2005/06 and 2010/11 sponsored academies again had shown a faster rate of improvement. By 2010/11, the attainment gap between sponsored academies and other state-funded schools had halved, and attainment in sponsored academies was higher than that in 'similar' schools.</p> <p>When comparing sub-sets of academies open for different lengths of time, on average those which had been open longest had the highest results, including higher attainment, and tended to have higher pupil progress when measured by value-added. The median value-added score was equivalent to pupils obtaining one grade higher in three GCSEs; though each sub-set of academies contained schools above and schools below the national average. Similarly, results for FSM and SEN pupils increased the longer a sponsored academy had been open.</p> <p>The report concludes that 'when comparing like-with-like, the results suggest that Sponsored Academies (once they have had long enough to turn around a school's previous poor performance) are performing better than similar non-Academy schools for pupils overall and for disadvantaged pupils in particular' (p. 26).</p> | | |
| Methodology | Quantitative secondary analysis and propensity score matching of outcomes of pupils in sponsored academies. The analysis compared the academies with a group of maintained schools whose characteristics were as similar as possible to those of the academies. Data sources included Statistical First Releases, the National Pupil Database and Secondary School Performance Tables. | | |
| Full reference | Department for Education (2012). <i>Attainment at Key Stage 4 by Pupils in Academies 2011</i> (DfE Research Report 223) [online]. Available: https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/184062/DFE-RR223.pdf [28 April, 2015]. | | |

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|---|--|---|---------------------|
| Title: <i>Academies and Free Schools</i> | | Author(s): GB. Parliament. HoC. Education Committee (2015) | |
| Aims: | | An Education Committee enquiry into the academies and free schools programme. | |
| Coverage of evidence | | Type of academy | |
| ✓ | Do academies achieve better results? | ✓ | Converter academies |
| ✓ | What impact do academies have on other schools? | ✓ | Sponsored academies |
| | How do parents know if an academy provides a good education? | ✓ | Other |
| Key findings | <p>Do academies achieve better results? The Committee finds that current evidence does not allow conclusions to be drawn on whether academies in themselves are a positive force for change. They state that there is no convincing evidence of the impact of academy status on attainment in primary schools. They find a highly variable picture across the country, and in the case of sponsored academies, across chains. Whilst some academy chains have proved effective at raising attainment, others achieve worse outcomes than comparable state-maintained schools. The Committee explains that these findings are in part a matter of timing, but also notes that more information is needed on the performance of individual academy chains. Furthermore, they state that it is too early to judge whether academies raise standards overall or for disadvantaged children.</p> <p>Impact of academies on other schools? The Committee states that collaboration is essential in a self-improving school system in order to provide challenge, support and economies of scale. Harnessing the effectiveness of partnerships to raise school performance is particularly important where schools are autonomous. They find that evidence suggests that collaboration is likely to be effective if it is brokered by a third party, such as a trust or local authority.</p> <p>The report makes a number of recommendations including: strengthening oversight and monitoring of schools at the local level; enhancing transparency and accountability of academy funding arrangements and expansion of academy chains; establishing protocols so that parental complaints are dealt with effectively.</p> | | |
| Methodology | The Committee received around 140 written submissions from a wide range of witnesses and held ten sessions of oral evidence, hearing from 50 individuals, representing many different organisations, including the DfE. The Committee supplemented these formal procedures with an informal seminar with experts and with visits to Hull, Boston and New Orleans. | | |
| Full reference | GB. Parliament. House of Commons. Education Committee (2015). <i>Academies and Free Schools: Fourth Report of Session 2014-15. Report, Together with Formal Minutes Relating to the Report</i> (HC 258) [online]. Available: http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201415/cmselect/cmeduc/258/258.pdf [28 April, 2015]. | | |

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|---|---|
| Title: <i>The Introduction of Academy Schools to England's Education</i> Author(s): Eyles and Machin (2014) | |
| Aims: | An academic study of the impact of conversion to academy status on pupil intake and pupil performance. |
| Coverage of evidence | Type of academy |
| ✓ Do academies achieve better results? | ✓ Converter academies |
| What impact do academies have on other schools? | Sponsored academies |
| How do parents know if an academy provides a good education? | Other |
| Key findings | <p>The study finds that schools which converted to academy status appear to attract and admit higher ability pupils; thus, to judge what effect the status change has had, it is necessary to study the outcomes for pupils who were already enrolled prior to conversion. On this basis, the researchers find statistically significant increases in KS4 standardised test scores for Year 11 pupils in schools converting to become academies.</p> <p>The research also considers Ofsted inspections of schools before and after academy conversion, in relation to a control group of schools which did not convert, and finds that school performance rankings are more likely to increase in the schools that became academies.</p> <p>Headteacher turnover in conversion year was significant; headteachers were likely to change in, on average, 63 per cent of the academies studied. The researchers also find some evidence of the introduction of new curriculum subjects after conversion. They conclude that 'changes in school leadership and in the curriculum offered by the school seem to underpin the KS4 improvements observed for pupils enrolled in schools that became academies in the Labour years' (p. 23).</p> |
| Methodology | An empirical study that models converter academies during the sample period as the treatment group and the future converters as a balanced comparison group in a difference-in-differences setting. Analysis involved the modelling of treatment and control groups, respectively those schools that had already become academies during the sample period ('current academies', n = 106) and those who were to go on to do so after the end of the sample period ('future academies', n = 100). |
| Full reference | Eyles, A. and Machin, S. (2014). 'The introduction of academy schools to England's education.' Presentation at the CESifo Area Conference on Economics of Education, CESifo Conference Centre, Munich, 12 September. |

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|---|---|---|---------------------|
| Title: Plan A+ 2014: the Unfinished Revolution | | Author(s): Finch et al. (2014) | |
| Aims: | | Research paper by the Thinktank 'Reform' and the SSAT exploring academy schools' experience of converting to academy status | |
| Coverage of evidence | | Type of academy | |
| ✓ | Do academies achieve better results? | ✓ | Converter academies |
| ✓ | What impact do academies have on other schools? | ✓ | Sponsored academies |
| ✓ | How do parents know if an academy provides a good education? | | Other |
| Key findings | <p>Do academies achieve better results? The research finds that, since becoming academies, student headline results have improved in just over half of the schools surveyed. A similar proportion of schools also reported improvement in the results of disadvantaged pupils. This figure increased to nearly two-thirds of sponsored academies but was the case in less than half of converter academies. The researchers conclude that the results therefore suggest that it takes time for the benefits of conversion to be reflected in exam results.</p> <p>Impact of academies on other schools? The research finds that survey respondents were more likely to feel that their relationships with local community groups, FE/HE providers and other local schools had improved than that they had worsened. However, it should also be noted that around one in five felt that their relationships with local authorities had worsened. While, in principle, converter academies are required to support and help raise attainment in local maintained schools, in practice only half reported that they had yet worked with vulnerable schools and a third had not yet put such plans in place. Secondary academies, larger academies and converter academies were more likely to work with other schools. Researchers conclude that time is needed for benefits to be seen.</p> <p>How do parents know? Although the research does not address this area specifically, a third of respondents reported an increased demand for school places since becoming academies. As with other areas of the research the authors suggest that there appears to be a 'lagged effect', with a third of the schools opening since 2010 deeming it too early to say whether or not demand for places has increased, whereas just over half that became academies before 2010 now say that demand for places has increased.</p> | | |
| Methodology | A survey of SSAT member academies was conducted between June and October 2013. Just under 20 per cent of academies responded, of which approximately 90 per cent were academies which had opened or converted since 2010. The breakdown between converter and sponsored academies was a good match for the breakdown in the wider academy population, but in terms of the primary-secondary split there was a bias towards secondary academy respondents. The researchers state that they took note of this in their analysis. Findings are based on academy respondents' own perceptions. No comparison group of non-academies was included. | | |
| Full reference | Finch, A., Haldenby, A., Thorpe, L., Watkin, B. and Zuccollo, J. (2014). <i>Plan A+ 2014: the Unfinished Revolution</i> [online]. Available: http://www.reform.uk/wp-content/uploads/2014/10/140306_Plan_A_2014_Final_Report.pdf [28 March, 2015]. | | |

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|---|--|---|---------------------|
| Title: <i>The Link Between Academies in England, Pupil Outcomes and Local Patterns of Socio-economic Segregation Between Schools</i> | | Author(s): Gorard (2014) | |
| Aims: | | An academic study that investigates performance of academies and segregation between schools. | |
| Coverage of evidence | | Type of academy | |
| ✓ | Do academies achieve better results? | ✓ | Converter academies |
| ✓ | What impact do academies have on other schools? | ✓ | Sponsored academies |
| | How do parents know if an academy provides a good education? | | Other |
| Key findings | <p>The research finds that there is no convincing evidence that academies are any more or less effective than the schools they replaced or are in competition with, and that there is no success specific to academies that might not also have come from increased investment in 'failing' schools.</p> <p>The research highlights that referring to 'academies' in general is no longer appropriate, explaining that converter and sponsored academies have different profiles. This includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Converter academies generally take 'far less than their fair share of Free School Meal (FSM) pupils and sponsored academies generally take far more than their share'. • The prevalence of academies in any area is strongly associated with local levels of socio-economic status (SES) segregation, and this is especially true of the more recent converter academies. • Areas with higher levels of SES segregation since 1999 are now more likely to have high percentages of academies, especially converter academies. <p>The paper concludes that academies are not shown to be the cause of local SES segregation but are more likely to appear in areas that already have inequalitable school mixes.</p> | | |
| Methodology | Secondary analyses of official datasets involving all state-funded secondary schools in England (other than special schools), including DFE Performance Tables 2004-2012, the National Pupil Database, and the Annual Schools Census. | | |
| Full reference | Gorard, S. (2014). 'The link between academies in England, pupil outcomes and local patterns of socio-economic segregation between schools', <i>Research Papers In Education</i> , 29 , 3, 268–84 | | |

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| Title: | <i>Chain Effects: the Impact of Academy Chains on Low Income Students</i> | Author(s): | Hutchings et al. (2014) |
| Aims: | A Sutton Trust research report which analyses the success of academy chains. | | |
| Coverage of evidence | | Type of academy | |
| ✓ | Do academies achieve better results? | | Converter academies |
| | What impact do academies have on other schools? | ✓ | Sponsored academies |
| | How do parents know if an academy provides a good education? | | Other |
| Key findings | <p>The research finds that disadvantaged pupils in academies made greater progress than those in all mainstream schools and that sponsored academies made greater improvements in the proportion of pupils with sub-Level 4 KS2 attainment going on to achieve five A*-C GCSEs with English and maths than schools in the other comparison groups. The research identifies that chains of three or more academies had a greater impact than solo academies, but notes that there is also considerable variation between chains.</p> <p>The research finds a small number of similarities between the characteristics of the chains with the best outcomes for disadvantaged pupils including: experience in running academies, slow expansion, and a strong London base.</p> <p>The research concludes that the experiences of successful chains should be shared and that there needs to be increased monitoring and accountability. The authors recommend that DfE should increase the transparency of its procedures for awarding sponsorship and reduce the length of the funding agreements. They also recommend that, as more evidence becomes available, there should be robust research into what works.</p> | | |
| Methodology | <p>Secondary analysis of data derived from the DfE school performance database for schools in England. Chain level performance figures were calculated based on attainment measures such as 5 A*-C at GCSE including English and maths across the three academic years being studied, weighted by pupil numbers, both all-pupil and disadvantaged/non-disadvantaged. The sample comprised 125 secondary academies, in membership of 31 chains consistently since September 2010, and their performance was compared to several different sets of comparator schools. An acknowledged, a limitation of the research is that, during the period for which data is available, many academy chains were in the early stages of their development, and numbers of academies and chains continue to grow rapidly. As a result, the analysis is based on a relatively small sample, and in some cases the performance of the chain as a whole is based on a limited number of schools.</p> | | |
| Full reference | <p>Hutchings, M., Francis, B. and De Vries., R. (2014). <i>Chain Effects: the Impact of Academy Chains on Low Income Students</i> [online]. Available: http://www.suttontrust.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/08/chain-effects-july-14-final-1.pdf [28 March, 2015].</p> | | |

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| Title: | <i>Balancing Freedom and Fairness: Some Reflections on the Characteristics of Secondary Age Pupils Attending Academies</i> | Author(s): | Thomson (2013) |
| Aims: | A Fischer Family Trust research report providing statistical data on the nature and composition of academy schools' admission arrangements. | | |
| Coverage of evidence | | Type of academy | |
| ✓ | Do academies achieve better results? | ✓ | Converter academies |
| | What impact do academies have on other schools? | ✓ | Sponsored academies |
| | How do parents know if an academy provides a good education? | | Other |
| Key findings | <p>The research finds that, for each of the last ten years, pupils with low prior attainment were more likely to be on the roll of a sponsored academy than the average pupil and were more than twice as likely to be on roll as a pupil with high prior attainment. Conversely they find that pupils with low prior attainment were less likely than the average pupil to be on the roll of a converter academy. In addition, sponsored academies had well above average levels of pupil disadvantage over the period 2001/02 to 2011/12.</p> <p>Regarding the impact of attending an academy on attainment, of the latest three pupil cohorts to take end of KS4 exams, those at sponsored academies achieved significantly higher value-added scores on 'best eight' GCSEs and equivalents than did pupils who lived within an academy locality but attended other schools. In 2012, this was equivalent to more than one grade higher in each of two subjects. Analysis of GCSE results only, shows no substantive difference.</p> <p>The research concludes that there does not appear to be any systematic evidence that academy schools have used their ability to set their own admission criteria within the Admissions Code to the detriment of disadvantaged or lower ability children. As with any overarching position, it is by no means the case that all academies have not changed the profile of their intakes – far from it – but there is broad balance amongst them. Indeed, there is some evidence that the pupil intakes of academies are more broadly representative of their localities than were their predecessor schools.</p> | | |
| Methodology | Secondary data analysis of School Census data over the period 2001/02 to 2012/13. The data included all secondary schools that opened as academies up to September 2012 that had Year 7 cohorts and that could be matched to one or more predecessor schools also having a Year 7 cohort (n=1435). The paper primarily considers the change in intake of academies over time, without reference to a comparison group of non-academies. | | |
| Full reference | Thomson, D. (2013). <i>Balancing Freedom and Fairness: Some Reflections on the Characteristics of Secondary Age Pupils Attending Academies</i> (FFT Research Paper 1) [online]. Available: http://www.fft.org.uk/FFT/media/fft/News/Balancing_Freedom_Fairness_Aug13_1.pdf [28 March, 2015]. | | |

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| Title: <i>Are England's Academies More Inclusive or More 'Exclusive'? The Impact of Institutional Change on the Pupil Profile of Schools</i> | | Author(s): Wilson (2011) | |
| Aims: | An academic discussion paper which examines whether academies have been able to meet the objective of inclusivity at the same time as addressing that of raising standards. | | |
| Coverage of evidence | | Type of academy | |
| ✓ | Do academies achieve better results? | | Converter academies |
| | What impact do academies have on other schools? | ✓ | Sponsored academies |
| | How do parents know if an academy provides a good education? | | Other |
| Key findings | <p>The research finds that sponsored academies are failing some disadvantaged pupils and that the intake into these academies has consisted of a lower proportion of pupils from relatively deprived backgrounds. The author suggests that this relative rise in stratification within the schooling system – compared to that which went before – indicates a worsening of education inequality.</p> <p>The author warns that converter academies may take advantage of aspects like independence from local authority control, coupled with a continued pursuit of academic excellence, to adapt their admissions towards a more homogeneous and advantageous pupil intake. The author concludes that such a fragmented situation would further reduce fairness in access to schools, lowering potential attainment and educational opportunity among disadvantaged pupils in particular.</p> | | |
| Methodology | A secondary data analysis using data from the National Pupil Database, Edubase and the Annual School Census. The analysis involved difference-in-differences regression estimation combined with propensity score matching to identify a suitable group of non-academy comparator schools. The sample comprised a small sample of early sponsored academies, namely 33 academies from the first five cohorts of such schools established between 2002-07, along with a comparison group of 389 non-academy schools located in the same LAs, of which 326 were matched with the 33 academies as having a sufficiently similar set of characteristics for comparison. | | |
| Full reference | Wilson, J. (2011). <i>Are England's Academies More Inclusive or More 'Exclusive'? The Impact of Institutional Change on the Pupil Profile of Schools</i> (CEE Discussion Paper 125) [online]. Available: http://cee.lse.ac.uk/ceedps/ceedp125.pdf [28 March, 2015]. | | |

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| Title: <i>Analysis of Academy School Performance in GCSEs 2013</i> | | Author(s): Worth (2014) | |
| Aims: | Research commissioned by the LGA and conducted by NFER to investigate how performance in national examinations in academies compares to performance in similar non-academies | | |
| Coverage of evidence | | Type of academy | |
| ✓ | Do academies achieve better results? | ✓ | Converter academies |
| | What impact do academies have on other schools? | ✓ | Sponsored academies |
| | How do parents know if an academy provides a good education? | | Other |
| Key findings | <p>The research finds that attainment progress between Key Stage 2 and Key Stage 4 outcomes is higher after two years in sponsored academies compared with similar non-academy schools. The author explains that ‘some of this difference could be interpreted as mean reversion rather than an academy impact, though this has been largely addressed by restricting the comparator schools to be those that are most similar to sponsored academies to begin with’ (p. 24).</p> <p>The author finds no significant difference in attainment progress after two years between converter academies and similar non-academy schools, suggesting that the short-term school performance benefits are limited. The research therefore suggests that a longer time frame may be needed to fully assess the relative performance of converter academies, but the data so far seems to suggest academy status has made little difference to the progress made by pupils in converter academies compared to pupils in similar non-academy schools. Again mean reversion might be a factor, though as before non-academy schools that did not provide a good comparison were excluded from the analysis.</p> <p>The research finds that attainment progress in sponsored academies compared to similar non-academies is not significantly different over time when the outcome is measured as GCSE points, excluding equivalent qualifications such as BTECs. This suggests that sponsored academies either use more equivalent qualifications, or that their pupils do better in them. The same was found for converter academies, though to a lesser extent than in sponsored academies.</p> | | |
| Methodology | <p>Analysis at the school level used average attainment at Key Stage 2 as measure of prior attainment and as a way to control for schools having different pupil intakes. Pupil progress was measured between KS2 and average GCSE points score. Two measures of GCSE attainment were used: average total point score (capped) and the proportion of pupils achieving five or more A* to C grades. Other school level factors that may have been associated with a variation in pupil progress were also included within the models. These included the proportion of pupils on free school meals and the proportion of pupils with special educational needs, as well as geographical location. Secondary data analysis of 3020 secondary schools, including 447 sponsored academies and 1211 converter academies.</p> | | |
| Full reference | <p>Worth, J. (2014). <i>Analysis of Academy School Performance in GCSEs 2013</i> [online]. Available: http://www.nfer.ac.uk/publications/LGGA02/LGGA02.pdf [28 April, 2015].</p> | | |

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