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Should You Meet the Parents? The Impact of Information on Non-Test Score Attributes on School Choice

Abstract

Understanding parental response to non-test score attributes is crucial to design effective school choice systems. We study an intervention providing hard-to-find information on the school environment at local institutions, while holding information on school performance constant. Outflow to private education is reduced by 17%, with larger responses among advantaged students. Parents respond by increasing take-up of offers from local schools, intensifying competition for seats. Social interactions increase the program's impact by 40%. Consistent with our interpretation, the intervention does not affect parental demand for school performance. We conclude that simple, low-cost interventions can improve state schools' finances and peer quality.

JEL-Codes: I240, I280, H750.

Keywords: school choice, non-test score school attributes, information intervention.

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1 Introduction

Over the past few decades, there has been a rapid and broad adoption of policies aimed at expanding parental school choice (Musset, 2012).[1] School choice advocates argue that this approach, aligning school incentives with parental preferences, improves school quality and boosts student achievement through competition (Hoxby, 2003). Recent empirical evidence suggests, however, that when choosing a school parents consider factors beyond schools' causal impact on achievement, such as peer quality and proximity (see MacLeod and Urquiola, 2019, for a review).

School choices may reflect the information available to parents rather than their preferences for school attributes. Information interventions in education have been shown to shift individual choices and affect the equilibrium levels of school quality (Andrabi et al., 2017). Previous studies have focused on information about school quality, value-added or test scores (e.g., Ajayi et al., 2017). Even when informational gaps on hard school metrics are closed, however, parents do not maximize on these factors (Ainsworth et al., 2023). Despite the relevance of the non-test score dimensions of school quality for students' long-term outcomes (Beuermann et al., 2023), we still know little about the effects of providing information on attributes other than school performance indicators on school choice.

We study whether parental choice responds to hard-to-find information about attributes other than test scores. We exploit an intervention called "Meet The Parents" (MTP), which targets prospective secondary school parents and students in a context where information on test scores is already widespread and not affected by the treatment. We examine how information on the "school environment" (e.g., school atmosphere, school discipline, safety, food quality, inclusive ethos) at local secondary institutions impacts school choices and parental demand for school attributes.

MTP consists of meetings targeted to parents and students who are about to apply for secondary school. Events are based in a primary ("host") school and involve a panel dis-

[1] Examples of these policies are vouchers reducing tuitions at private schools (Epple et al., 2017), promotion of alternative state school models (e.g., charter schools in the US or academies in the UK), or "open enrollment" programs, whereby households can apply to any state school and are assigned based on preference. Introduced in the 1980s, open enrollment in England allows parents to rank up to six preferred schools at application.

cussion with parents and students from local secondary ("participating") schools. Both host and participating schools are state-funded ("state" schools). Launched in 2012 in the London Borough of Camden, MTP aims to address the outflow of local students from state to private education in the primary-to-secondary school transition. We study 85 MTP meetings organized between 2012 and 2018 in 30 host schools, corresponding to 60% of local primary schools.

We first document that MTP meetings provide hard-to-find information on non-test score school attributes. First, a text analysis of the meeting minutes shows that the discussion overwhelmingly focuses on attributes related to the school environment rather than academic performance. Second, surveyed participants place a high value on the non-test score attributes of the school environment, and commonly cite MTP as one of the most important sources of information for their school choice. As a result of the meetings, more than 70% of participants reportedly change their minds about the schools they were considering.

We evaluate the impact of MTP on school choices using a difference-in-differences (DiD) design. We link data on the staggered implementation of MTP with student-level administrative records on the universe of children in state schools, and track students' choices as they transition from primary to secondary education. Our research design compares changes in secondary school choices of students exposed to MTP in the last two grades of primary school (treatment) to those of students not exposed to MTP (control), before and after the start of the initiative. The control group consists of unexposed students attending primary school in Camden or bordering districts, who arguably face the same secondary school market as treated students. Since admission depends on residence-school distance, we further exploit granular data on children's location to control for residence. The identifying assumption is that, absent MTP, changes in school choice would have been similar in treated and control schools, and it is supported by null pre-treatment estimates.

MTP increases parental choice of local state schools. Enrollment in state schools increases by 2.4 percentage points (p.p.), corresponding to 1 additional student per school year opting for the public sector and a 17% reduction in the outflow to private schools. Treatment effects are driven by parents with high socio-economic status (SES) and high-ability students. This result is consistent with the intervention's target and implies a posi-

tive effect on local state schools' peer quality. Moreover, parents only respond to newly acquired information related to the school environment. Exploiting variation in the meeting-specific content, we find that enrollment increases only in meetings where the discussion predominantly revolves around school environment as opposed to academic performance. Using school preference data, available for a subset of years, we show that parents respond by increasing the take-up of centralized state school offers.

We then study spillover effects of MTP, providing evidence of both competition for limited seats in local state schools and the importance of social interactions in school choice. We identify the indirect effects of MTP by exploiting variation in the spatial exposure to treated parents (i.e., the share of treated students residing in a student's census block). As commonly found in information interventions (Bettinger et al., 2022), information spreads through word-of-mouth to local untreated parents, increasing their likelihood of enrollment into participating schools. In the absence of competition for seats, direct and indirect impacts of MTP would sum up to 5 p.p, with social interactions increasing MTP's impact by 40%. The increase in competition for oversubscribed schools reduces this effect by one fifth.

Finally, MTP only shifts parental demand for non-test score school attributes. Consistent with the literature (e.g. Burgess et al., 2015), parents hold a strong preference for high-performing schools closer to where they live, regardless of MTP. The programme, however, does not alter parental demand for school performance, distance, or school type, implying that MTP held demand for attributes other than the school environment constant.

Our findings contribute to the literature on the effect of information on school choice, which has mainly focused on information about school performance indicators.[2] In contrast, we take advantage of a unique real-world setting where information on school performance is widespread and held constant, allowing us to evaluate the impact of information on non-test score attributes. Moreover, while prior work has focused on low-SES households, we examine an intervention targeting medium-high SES families, whose school choices are likely to be better informed because of their lower information gathering costs and greater investment in education.[3]

[2] See, among others, Hastings and Weinstein (2008); Jensen (2010); Kessel and Olme (2017); Allende et al. (2019), and Burgess and Greaves (2021) for a review of the school choice literature.

[3] Lavecchia et al. (2016) review the existing evidence on information interventions providing information

Our work is also related to studies of parental preferences for schools. A growing body of work has shown that parents may not value schools' impact on test scores (Rothstein, 2006), while they respond to attributes such as peer quality, proximity to residence, and long-term student outcomes (Hastings et al., 2009; Burgess et al., 2015; Glazerman and Dotter, 2017; Beuermann and Jackson, 2020; Abdulkadiroglu et al., 2020). Beuermann et al. (2023) show that parents prefer schools that improve non-test score long-term outcomes, which do not necessarily overlap with schools' impact on test scores. We contribute by providing causal evidence that parents respond to information on non-test score school attributes. Ainsworth et al. (2023) and Campos (2023) elicit parental beliefs on school and peer quality and show that parents' opinions are not fully accurate. As parental beliefs were not elicited, we do not directly look at how parents update their views about performance or the school environment. However, departing from the existing literature, we show that discussing the school environment at local public-sector schools impacts school preferences and enrolment choices. Our findings imply that parental choices – on which the effectiveness of school choice policies hinges – are not necessarily well-informed on such attributes.

The policy implications are immediate. Since state school funding is mainly based on enrollment, any outflow from the public sector diminishes the resources available to local schools. As a result, outflows exacerbate educational inequality and harm the students who are left behind, especially those from disadvantaged backgrounds (Jackson et al., 2016; Gibbons et al., 2017; Lafortune et al., 2018). We quantify that MTP generated a net increase in financial resources of £318,945 for the public school sector during the first five years of the program. Moreover, the inflow of high-SES students may affect educational outcomes over and beyond a resource effect. An improved composition of the student body may generate positive peer effects and increase teachers' effort, parental participation, or the schools' ability to raise additional resources (Altonji et al., 2015). Our findings imply that simple and relatively inexpensive interventions targeting prospective parents may weaken concerns about the adverse effects of school choice on educational stratification and inequality (Hsieh and Urqiuola, 2006; Laverde, 2022).

in education and other areas. The existence of a gradient between information and SES is widely accepted in the literature.

2 Context and Data

2.1 The Education System and School Choice in England

In England, primary education is mainly provided by the public sector, with 93% of primary school-age children enrolled in state tuition-free schools (DfE, 2016). The majority of students attend schools over which the school district (or Local Authority; hereafter, LA) retains full or partial control. State primary education is organized in two phases, Key Stage 1 (KS1, grades 1-2) and Key Stage 2 (KS2, grades 3-6). In the final year of KS2 (age 11), students sit national standardized tests (SATs) in mathematics and English.

Parents apply for secondary school seats at the beginning of grade 6. Applications are free of charge and admission to state schools is regulated by a Deferred Acceptance mechanism. Parents rank up to six schools and receive an offer from the most-preferred school that they can access. In cases of oversubscription, children with equal priority are admitted based on home-school distance.[4] While primary schools are small and seats are typically rationed, implying very narrow catchment areas, secondary schools are much bigger. In London, primary schools enroll on average 48 students per cohort, residing on average 1 kilometer from the school, while secondary schools enroll 140 students residing 2.1 kilometers from the school.

Information on schools' average test scores and student composition are public and freely available to parents online. Every year, the Department for Education (DfE) publishes School Performance Tables for each primary and secondary school. These include *hard* information on standardized test scores, pupils' demographics, and value-added measures, and are used to form school rankings. Additionally, the Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted) conducts inspections at schools and formulates school ratings that are widely disseminated.[5]

Private schools, often called "independent schools", are not bound by the national cur-

[4] Table A.1 documents admission priorities for secondary schools participating in MTP.

[5] Several papers show that parents respond to information about school Performance Tables (Gibbons and Machin, 2003; Gibbons and Machin, 2006; Gibbons et al., 2013; Battistin and Neri, 2023), and that Ofsted ratings affect school choice, house prices, and parental time investment (Greaves and Hussain, 2021; Hussain, 2023; Greaves et al., 2023). Since Ofsted reports cover a wealth of qualitative and quantitative aspects – such as school discipline, leadership and management effectiveness, teaching quality, and test scores – it is hard to isolate how parents respond to the specific components. In contrast, MTP meetings' content focuses on the school environment (see Section 3). See an example of a Performance table and an Ofsted report of an MTP-participating secondary school here and here.

riculum. They enjoy substantial freedom in terms of the subjects they teach and other educational practices. Unlike state schools, private schools do not participate in the centralized assignment mechanism, and they may select students based on ability or other criteria. Average annual fees amounted to around £5,000 in the period of analysis, with substantial variation. They typically feature relatively small class sizes, high-quality facilities, and above-average academic performance (see, e.g., Independent Schools Council, 2019).[6] Information on private school performance is available from the Independent School Council's website (for affiliated schools) and from several media outlets, which regularly publish rankings of private schools.

2.2 The Meet The Parents (MTP) Initiative

MTP was launched in 2012 by a group of parents concerned about the impacts of the transition from primary to secondary school on the local community. The project started in the London borough of Camden, where a substantial share of parents enroll their children outside the local state sector at the end of primary education. Before the intervention, on average, 10% of students opted for private education after attending a state primary school in Camden and around 25% opted for a school in other districts (the averages in London are 9% and 17%, respectively).[7] Since funding is mainly based on enrollment counts, this outflow of students worsens local schools' finances. Moreover, since private school students typically have advantaged socio-economic backgrounds, the outflow amplifies the socio-economic disparity in local schools and increases educational segregation.[8]

MTP consists of primary school-level meetings where primary school parents and children learn about the school choice and experience of their peers at local secondary schools. Events are typically one hour long and involve a panel discussion guided by a moderator (Figure A.1). On average, meetings are attended by panelists from four participating

[6]Private institutions in Greater London display remarkable heterogeneity in quality. In 2012, the first year of MTP, the average proportion of students awarded the top grade at the end of KS4 was 33% in independent schools (Independent School Council - ISC) and 25% in state schools. For the subset of private schools that are not affiliated to the ISC and for which KS4 data is unavailable, 65% of them are rated as good or outstanding by Ofsted, whereas 92% of state schools receive similar positive ratings.

[7]Camden residents have on average a relatively high income (see LA-level data).

[8]Outflow may also hurt the achievement of children who stay in the public sector. In the presence of non-linear peer effects, disadvantaged pupils benefit from well-supported peers without decreasing their achievement (Carrell et al., 2009; Bertoni et al., 2020).

schools, which contribute to the organizers' costs through a flat fee of £380 per meeting. The average participating school is present at one or two meetings per year. Events are scheduled at the beginning of the academic year, a few weeks before last-grade parents apply for secondary school seats. The average event is attended by 17 primary school parents, about 40% of the average cohort size, most with children in the last two grades (5 and 6).[9]

Each meeting follows a standardized outline. In the first part, panelists are asked the following questions: (i) Why did you choose your secondary school? (ii) What do you like about your school? (iii) What would you change? The second part is open to discussion, with topics typically including day-to-day school life, the reasons to chose their school, the overall assessment of their choice. Importantly, panelists never mention school performance indicators. Events aim to provide an honest assessment of local state secondary schools from credible "insiders" with no advertising intent (e.g., school leaders are not invited).[10] In Section 3, we present a detailed description of the topics discussed through a text analysis of the meeting minutes.

Overall, MTP provides information on qualitative, non-test score school dimensions, hard for parents to find elsewhere. Since test scores are easily accessible and widely publicized, we leverage the fact that parents are already informed about performance indicators to isolate the effect of information on non-test score attributes.

2.3 Data

We use the National Pupil Database (NPD), providing administrative records on the population of students in state schools in 2006-2019. We track individual school enrollment throughout compulsory education. We observe gender, ethnicity, language spoken at home, eligibility for free school meals (FSM), special education needs, residence and income deprivation at the census block level.[11] Achievement data include teacher assessments at the

[9]Parental participation data are available for 67% of meetings. We impute participation in missing years using school-level averages at schools with consistent data availability, increasing coverage to 83%.

[10]Private schools are not discussed during the meetings. MTP organizers describe the program as "filling a gap between slick open days and playground rumors". See the MTP website for further details.

[11]Census blocks are Lower Layer Super Output Areas (LSOAs), created by the Office for National Statistics (ONS) for statistical purposes. On average, LSOAs include 800 households – around $1/3$ the size of a US census block –, span about 0.25 square miles and, in London, house 17 pupils per grade.

end of KS1 (age 7), and test scores from KS2 SATs (age 11). In addition, for the years 2014-2019, NPD is linked to administrative data on centralized assignment to schools including, for each student, the ranking of preferred schools and the school offered.

Students attending private schools are not recorded in the NPD. We code a student attending the last year of primary school as enrolling into a private institution if she is not tracked in the dataset one year later. This yields a private school enrollment rate in London of about 10%, consistent with official statistics.[12] Other reasons for disappearance from the dataset could be that a student leaves the country or is taken out of school for medical reasons. In case of grade retention, we observe the student repeating the same school grade. Any measurement error in private school enrollment is hardly affected by MTP and is then addressed by our DiD design. As expected, students leaving state education have higher KS2 scores (0.5 standard deviations, SD) and are in higher SES families compared to peers opting for state schools.

We combine administrative data with records on MTP meetings provided by the organizers. Data include year, host school, participating schools, and the number of participants at each event. Participants cannot be individually linked to administrative data. Every year, participants are surveyed about how MTP changed their school choices. We complement this with a more detailed survey administered in 2019 where we asked about the sources of information parents use, and the school features they value the most (see Figures A.2 and A.3).[13] Finally, we use the meeting minutes from the $2014-2018$ MTP rounds to describe the informational content of the meetings.

MTP was launched in 2012 and progressively rolled out, as shown in Figure 1. Between 2012 and 2018, 30 primary schools hosted MTP meetings. Initially run in a pilot host school, the program was extended to include up to 20 primary schools (Panel A) and up to 17 participating schools (Panel B) per year. The initiative is concentrated in the district of Camden (Figure 2). 60% of the primary schools in the district hosted at least one meeting (25 out of 42). Secondary schools are less concentrated, reflecting larger catchment areas, with 9 out of 22 participating schools located in Camden (70% of local secondary schools), while the remaining schools are in the bordering LAs.

Primary schools decide every year whether to host an MTP meeting, potentially de-

[12] Aggregate figures show that 10% of secondary school students are in private schools in 2011 (link).
[13] We collected 195 survey responses submitted by about 50% of participants from 20 primary schools.

pending on factors such as the interest of parents or school leaders about secondary school choice. Primary schools do not face any financial incentives to host meetings based on their impact on local secondary enrollment. They are positively selected in terms of student intake with, e.g., a higher share of white students and higher average test scores compared to other local primary schools (Table 1, columns 1-3). We deal with systematic differences between treated and control schools in our research design (see Section 4).

Participating schools are recruited every year and may target meetings at their preferred primary schools. Since our treatment varies at the primary school level, the selection of secondary schools into MTP does not pose identification issues. Rather, it helps to interpret the effects we observe, which may be explained by a selected pool of secondary schools. The joint distribution of academic performance of host and participating schools (Table A.2) is not polarised, implying that participating schools do not target host schools based on test scores. Participating schools are slightly negatively selected with respect to other local secondary schools, enrolling, e.g., higher share of FSM eligible students or lower-performing students (Table 1, columns 4-6). However, regression analysis shows no statistically significant differences in school characteristics by participation in MTP (Table A.3, column 1). Moreover, we find no differences in baseline *changes* of characteristics between participating and non participating schools (Table A.3, columns 2-3).

3 Interpreting the Effect of MTP on School Choice

What do families learn from the meetings, and to what extent do they use this information in their school choices? We use meeting minutes to describe the content of the discussion, and survey data to illustrate how valuable this information is to parents.

Attributes related to the school environment are those most mentioned during MTP meetings, supporting our interpretation that participants learn about school dimensions other than test scores. To characterize the meetings' content, we employ Latent Dirichlet Allocation (LDA, e.g. Schwarz, 2018; Bursztyn et al., 2023), an unsupervised topic model that identifies *topics*, i.e., clusters of words that are commonly found in proximity to each other within a given meeting transcript, and then characterizes each document as a mixture

of these topics.[14] We use LDA to identify ten topics, presented in Appendix Table D.1. We categorize these topics in a straightforward manner. We first define as *performance* all topics containing words related to academic performance and curricula (e.g. "homework", "learning", "sets", "ability"). Based on this labeling, we define three out of ten topics as related to academic performance, with average total topic share across documents of around 20%. The remaining seven topics are labeled as *environment*, and feature words related to student behavior, support, bullying, school clubs, sports activities, socialization at the school, and lunch policies.[15]

Around 80% of the topics discussed during MTP meetings relate to the school environment at the participating schools (Figure 3). Student performance at participating schools, therefore, is not the main focus of the meetings. Furthermore, even in the few instances when performance-related words are observed, the context in which they are mentioned mainly pertains to the school environment. For instance, in Topic 4 the word "academic" is associated with words like "dress", "confident", "fair", "feminist". This is not surprising since information on academic performance and school composition is already public and salient. Indeed, only 3.7% of participants report not to consider school Performance Tables when choosing secondary school.[16] Parents – particularly those relatively advantaged targeted by MTP – are likely to be already aware of the distribution of these characteristics across local schools.

Survey evidence supports the interpretation of MTP as an information treatment. About 40% of respondents list MTP as one of the most valuable sources of information, similar to other parents' opinions, with only school open days scoring higher (Figure 4, Panel A). 72% of respondents report having widened the set of schools they were considering as a result of the meetings, suggesting that learning about the environment at local schools

[14] We use meeting minutes from 2014 – 2018 MTP rounds, which are available for 13 out of 22 participating schools. The main advantage of LDA is that it identifies topics within text, even if topics are entangled, in an objective and replicable way. See Appendix D.1 for details. As an alternative approach, we perform a manual word allocation (see Appendix D.2 for details). Under this allocation, 57% words are related to school environment, 33% to performance, and the remaining 9% concerns teachers. The manual allocation underestimates the extent to which the school environment is discussed because it doesn't account for the co-occurrence of words, a feature captured by LDA.

[15] Example of words included in environment topics are: "dress", "social", "feminist", "feel", "bullying", "detention", "playground, "lunchtime", "nurturing", "happy", "feeling", "gossip", "diversity", "welcoming", "pastoral".

[16] One might still worry that the occasional reference to academic performance could impact parental school choice. We test for this in Appendix B, finding that meetings with relatively high performance content do not affect parental enrollment.

reportedly shifts parental preferences.

Parents value a wide array of school attributes beyond academic performance. Besides proximity, a "general good impression" of the school is the most frequently cited reason for parents' choices (Burgess et al., 2015). Beuermann and Jackson (2020) and Beuermann et al. (2023) find that parents value schools' effects on several long-term socio-economic outcomes often weakly correlated with schools' impact on test scores. To assess such effects, parents may look beyond measurable school characteristics.

Based on both text and survey analyses, we conclude that MTP informs parents about hard-to-find non-test score school attributes that they are likely to value when choosing a school.[17] Survey data show that the most sought-after school attributes include, for example, a welcoming atmosphere, inclusive ethos, or pastoral care, while academic performance is among those least frequently mentioned (Figure 4, Panel B). Combined with the results in Panel A, where school Performance Tables are not among the most-cited sources of information, survey evidence confirms that parents seek to learn about the school environment. According to our text analysis, this is exactly what MTP offers. Our conceptual framework in Appendix C details our interpretation of MTP's effects on school choice.

4 Empirical Strategy

We estimate MTP's causal effect on school choice. We adopt a DiD strategy that exploits variation MTP exposure across primary schools and over time. Our treated group consists of students whose school hosts an MTP meeting while they are enrolled in the last grades (5 and 6).[18] To internalize plausible spillovers, we define all students in a school cohort

[17] An alternative channel would be that parents see their secondary school peers as role models. Although we cannot fully rule this channel out, we note that meeting content should not matter if results are driven by role modelling, in contrast with our results in Table B.3 (see Section 5.1 for details). Moreover, as an alternative mechanism, MTP events may enable parents to coordinate their school choice. However, this is unlikely since primary school cohorts are small, families live close to one another, and they have been interacting for the previous five to six years. MTP can hardly impact their chance to network. Finally, in the presence of correlated beliefs across school attributes, parents may update their views on school performance even if they are informed about school environment, thus impacting their choices. However, since information on school performance is widespread, parents can hardly update their views on *average* test scores at participating schools.

[18] Students in grades 5 and 6 accounts for about 90% of the participants. In our main analysis, we allow for primary schools exiting the treatment. This may threat our design if schools endogenously stop hosting MTP events based on parents' interest in participating schools. In Appendix B, we estimate "Intention-To-Treat" (ITT) specifications where we define MTP as an absorbing treatment. Results are similar to those

with an MTP meeting as treated. This choice is backed by survey evidence, since 97% of participants state that they plan to discuss the meeting's content with their peers. The implicit assumption is that information gathered through MTP spreads within a school grade.[19] This criterion yields 3,906 treated students. Our control group is formed by students attending primary schools that never hosted an MTP meeting and are located in Camden or a bordering LA.[20]

Treated and control students exhibit different private school enrolment, test scores, demographics, and school preferences (Table 2). At baseline, treated students are substantially less likely to accept their offered state school seat (70% against 80%) and more likely to enroll at a private school (14% against 10%), consistent with the concerns that sparked the initiative. In line with the the program's target, the average KS2 score in maths is 0.12 SD for treated against -0.10 SD for control students. Nonetheless, both groups arguably belongs to the same secondary school market, and are likely exposed to the same changes in terms of enrollment outcomes.

We compare changes in school choice outcomes of treated and control students in a DiD design. We estimate the following two-way fixed effect (TWFE) model:

$$Y_i = \alpha_1 MTP_{s(i),t(i)} + X'_{i,t(i)}\zeta + W'_{s(i),t(i)}\delta + \phi_{s(i)} + \phi_{t(i)} + \phi_{l(i)} + e_i, \tag{1}$$

where Y_i is a school choice outcome for pupil i measured in Year 7, the first grade of secondary school. $s(\cdot)$, $t(\cdot)$ and $l(\cdot)$ map student i to their school, year, and block in the last grades of primary school. $MTP_{s(i),t(i)}$ is the treatment indicator, equal to 1 for primary schools organizing an MTP meeting in the year $t(i)$ when student i is enrolled in grade five or six. School ($\phi_{s(i)}$) and year ($\phi_{t(i)}$) fixed effects isolate DiD variation in our treatment variable, with $\phi_{s(i)}$ controlling for any time-invariant school choice pattern at the school level. Census block fixed effects ($\phi_{l(i)}$) control for time-invariant impacts of residence on school choice. This is particularly relevant in our context, since residential sorting affects

documented in Section 5 (see Table B.1).

[19] On average, 40% of last-grades students attend MTP meetings. In an informational experiment on student behavior, Bettinger et al. (2022) find large spillovers within classrooms, similar to treatment effects for directly exposed students. We would expect similar spillovers in our context since the typical primary school cohort has just one or two classes. Our assumption is also backed by recent evidence on social interactions in school choice (Campos, 2023).

[20] 93% of students in participating schools attended primary school in Camden or a bordering LA. 96% of students in our sample rank a school located in these LAs among their top three choices.

the choice set of available state schools. We cluster standard errors at the school level to account for intra-school correlation. The parameter α_1 identifies the causal effect of MTP on school choice under the assumption that, absent MTP, treated and control students would have followed similar school choice trends.

Recent econometric literature has highlighted several issues with TWFE estimators in the presence of variation in the treatment timing and heterogeneous treatment effects.[21] In our context, different schools enter treatment in different years, and we cannot rule out some degree of treatment effect heterogeneity. To deal with pitfalls in the TWFE estimation, we adopt a "stacked-by-event" design and build "placebo" events for control schools following Deshpande and Li (2019). First, we create a separate dataset for each treatment wave (i.e., for each event year). We build five datasets, corresponding to the five treatment waves in Figure A.5, excluding the first pilot primary school which started MTP in 2012. In each dataset, schools hosting an MTP meeting since the considered year form the treatment group, and schools in Camden or bordering districts that never hosted an MTP meeting serve as a control. Second, in each dataset, we define the time-to-event relative to the considered year.[22] Third, we stack all datasets into one. In this procedure, students enrolled at a control school serve as a control multiple times (i.e., once per treatment wave).

We use the stacked-by-event design to support the validity of the parallel trends assumption in a regression framework. We estimate the following model:

$$Y_{iw} = \sum_{k=-7}^{3} \beta_k MTP_{s(i)} \cdot D^k_{t(i),w} + \sum_{k=-7}^{3} \gamma_k D^k_{t(i),w} + \eta_{s(i)} + \eta_{t(i)} + \eta_{l(i)} + \nu_{iw}, \tag{2}$$

where $MTP_{s(i)}$ is a time-invariant treatment indicator for primary school s, $w = 2014, \ldots, 2018$ denotes treatment waves, and $D^k_{t(i),w} \equiv \mathbb{1}(t(i) - w = k)$ are event-time dummies equal to 1 if period t is k years from the considered event year. Notation otherwise follows Equation (1). The stacked-by-event design allows us to separately identify the year and event-time fixed effects, eliminating event time trends that do not appear in calendar time. We bin

[21] See, among others, De Chaisemartin and d'Haultfoeuille (2020); Baker et al. (2022); Borusyak et al. (2021); Callaway and Sant'Anna (2021); Goodman-Bacon (2021); Sun and Abraham (2021).

[22] The stacked-by-event design defines MTP as an absorbing treatment, and it is therefore robust to the potentially endogenous exit of host schools from MTP.

relative periods before -7 and after 3, where the sample of schools is unbalanced and therefore the estimates could be affected by compositional changes (Sun and Abraham, 2021). The coefficients of interest are the β_k's, which identify treatment effects k years from MTP entry. Pre-treatment coefficients (i.e., with $k = -1, ..., -7$) can be interpreted as placebo estimates of the MTP effect. Since school choice outcomes are observed once per student when they enter secondary education, post-treatment coefficients (i.e., with $k = 1, ..., 3$) are not meant to estimate the evolution of MTP's effects over time. Instead, they capture MTP's differential effects across student cohorts. To test the robustness of the estimates obtained with the stacked-by-event design, we further implement the estimator proposed by Borusyak et al. (2021).[23]

Estimates of pre-treatment coefficients are close to zero and not statistically significant for all main outcomes, supporting the validity of the identifying assumption. Figure 5 plots the estimates of β_k's for public-sector enrollment obtained using the stacked-by-event design in Equation (2) and the Borusyak et al. (2021) estimator. We cannot reject that pre-treatment coefficients are jointly equal to zero. Moreover, we find no pre-trends in participating school enrollment as well (Figure A.6). These findings are consistent with the observation that MTP started as a grass-roots movement that could hardly be anticipated by parents at the time of their children's enrollment into primary school.

5 Results

5.1 School choice outcomes

School enrollment. Exposure to MTP increases enrollment at state compared to private secondary schools. Panel A of Table 3 presents estimates of α_1 in Equation (1), where the outcome is an indicator for enrollment at a state school. Column (1) shows a positive correlation between MTP and public-sector enrollment conditional on year and census block. The coefficient on the time-invariant ($MTP_s(i)$) treatment indicator, absorbed by school FEs in subsequent columns, is negative, in line with the intervention's target of local primary schools from which the outflow to the private sector in secondary education is

[23] Results are also robust to the inclusion of treatment wave (or dataset) fixed effects and the use of a balanced sample of schools $-5/+3$ years from MTP entry. These results are available upon request.

more likely. Our DiD comparison in column (2) shows a lower but statistically significant causal effect. Estimates are barely affected when including controls for individual and primary school characteristics (column 3). On average, parents exposed to MTP are 2.4 p.p. (2.8%) more likely to enroll their pupils at a state school. This yields a 17% reduction in the students' outflow to private education (14% at baseline), and corresponds to one additional student per each MTP meeting enrolling in state schools.[24]

Public-sector enrollment trends start diverging across treated and control schools right after the MTP treatment starts. Estimates of post-treatment coefficients in Figure 5 are positive and statistically significant. In contrast, pre-treatment estimates revolve around zero and are mostly not significant, supporting our identifying assumption.

MTP has smaller enrollment impacts on secondary schools that participate in the meetings. In Panel B of Table 3, the outcome is an indicator of enrollment at any secondary school participating in at least one MTP meeting over our sample period. While the correlation in column (1) is large and significant, our DiD estimate in column (3) drops to a statistically not significant 1.4 p.p.[25] However, since enrollment is constrained by the supply of school seats, this result may reflect competition for participating schools among parents exposed to MTP. We explore this idea by using data on school preferences below, and by directly evaluating the extent of competition in Section 5.2.

MTP effects are driven by high-performing and high-SES students. Figures A.7 and A.8 report the estimated MTP effects on school enrollment by student subgroups. Students who are not eligible for FSM are 3.6 p.p. more likely to choose a state school and 2.7 p.p. more likely to enroll at a participating school, with respect to null impacts on students who are eligible (Panel A). While we detect no effects for students in the bottom quartile of KS2 scores, top-performing students exhibit positive and sizeable effects on enrollment. Similarly, MTP increases state and participating school enrollment of stu-

[24]This number is obtained by applying the estimated coefficient to the average baseline cohort size in the last grade of treated schools (40, see Table 1). We obtain similar results (available upon request) using enrollment into the second secondary school grade (Year 8). This finding suggests that families do not regret their choice and drop out of secondary school after one year.

[25]One concern may be that we are jointly considering the 22 schools participating in at least one MTP meeting rather than the significantly fewer schools a student is informed about at their specific meeting. The reason is that the set of participating schools varies across treated schools only, and therefore cannot be assigned to control students. As a result, our estimates of the impact on enrollment at participating schools may be diluted. We show in Table B.2 that a stacked-by-meeting design that considers only schools on which the child is informed delivers similar results.

dents in the lowest deprivation quartile by 6 p.p. and 5 p.p., respectively, while the impact declines with local deprivation and is zero in the top quartile (Panel B). Results are consistent with the program's target of relatively advantaged students and imply that, beyond the enrollment count, MTP increases peer quality at local state schools. The finding that comparatively advantaged students respond more, is in line with Corcoran et al. (2018). In addition, larger-than-average effects are estimated among non-native speakers and students who recently moved their residence. Since these subgroups are likely less rooted in the local education system, such results support the interpretation of MTP as an information treatment.

Content of MTP meeting. Parental enrollment responds to hard-to-find information on school environment, rather than information about other school dimensions. On average, about 80% of the meeting content is about the school environment and only 20% focuses on school performance (see Section 3). Even so, there is a concern that parents may be influenced by such limited information about school quality acquired during the meetings. To address this, we exploit variation in content across meetings in Table B.3, considering LDA and manual word allocation to topics in Panel A and B, respectively. We never find meetings with relatively high performance content to shift parental preferences more. Our preferred specification in column 2, Panel A, considering LDA allocation and the choice of participating schools (the schools on which information is received), shows that the increase in enrollment is entirely driven by meetings where the discussion mostly focuses on the school environment. This result corroborates the descriptive evidence from Section 3, and confirms that parents are responding to information on the school environment.[26]

School preferences. Using the subsample of years with information on school applications, we directly assess whether MTP changed parental preferences about local state schools.[27] Our findings, presented in Table 4, indicate that parents exposed to MTP are 6.4 p.p. more likely to take up their offer for state schools, and 5.3 p.p. for participating

[26] In addition, we show in Table B.4 that treatment effects do vary by parental participation in MTP meetings, suggesting that MTP effects are not explained by parent's chance to network.

[27] Since preference data are available from 2014, we consider only the 20 schools that joined MTP from 2015 onwards as the treatment group. The DiD comparisons for the 2015 treatment wave rely on one pre-treatment period only.

schools (columns 5-6). This rise in compliance is non negligible, corresponding to an increase of 6-8% over the control mean (with 80% of students enroling at the offered state school, see Table 2). In contrast, MTP does not affect the likelihood of parents to apply for a state school seat (column 1). This result is not surprising since almost all families (98% in our sample at baseline) indicated at least a preference for a state school. We also find null effects on the preference rank assigned to participating schools (columns 2-3). Therefore, increased demand for state and participating school works through increased compliance with state school assignments rather than changes in submitted rankings. The MTP effect on offer take-up is larger than its impact on state school enrollment.[28] This implies that MTP increases compliance with state-school offers also among parents who would enroll in state schools even without MTP, suggesting that they are more convinced about their choices.

5.2 Spillover effects: competition and word-of-mouth

We next examine whether MTP generates spillovers through geographical proximity to treated parents. Living in a block with a higher share of treated parents (i.e., whose primary school runs MTP in their child's last grades) may affect enrollment outcomes via two contrasting channels. First, parental interest in local secondary schools could increase through the spread of information conveyed by MTP ("word-of-mouth" channel).[29] Second, in the previous section we showed that MTP increases demand for local secondary schools of exposed parents, intensifying the competition for seats. This "competition" channel may decrease the probability of enrolling at local state schools that are oversubscribed.

We separately identify the competition from the word-of-mouth channel by exploiting variation in the share of treated students across neighborhoods. We focus on spillovers within neighborhoods given that our treatment definition already internalizes within school spillovers across parents. Following Autor et al. (2014), we measure the intensity of ex-

[28] We present MTP's effect on school enrolment for this subsample in columns (6)-(7), finding considerably larger estimates with respect to the results obtained with the main sample (Table 3, column 3). Since earlier treatment cohorts (2013 and 2014) are not considered in this analysis, this result may point to improvements in the events' effectiveness over time.

[29] Parents may share either the information they've learned from meetings or their (updated) school preferences with other parents. Although we cannot distinguish between the two actions, the main goal of this exercise is to assess the importance of parental social interactions in school choice that extend beyond the interactions experienced at school, which are already captured by the MTP treatment (Campos, 2023).

posure to treatment for student i as the share of students directly exposed to MTP in the census block $l(i)$ where student i resides at the time of primary school completion (the index t is omitted for simplicity):

$$MTPI_{l(i)} = \frac{\sum_j MTP_j \cdot \mathbb{1}[l(j) = l(i)]}{\sum_j \mathbb{1}[l(j) = l(i)]}$$

where MTP_j as an indicator equal to 1 if students j is exposed to MTP.

We estimate spillover effects through the following specification:

$$Y_i = \tau_1 MTP_{s(i),t(i)} + \tau_2 MTPI_{l(i),t(i)} + \tau_3 MTP_{s(i),t(i)} \cdot MTPI_{l(i),t(i)} + \eta_{s(i)} + \eta_{t(i)} + \eta_{l(i)} + \varepsilon_i \tag{3}$$

where notation follows Equation (1) and omits $X_{i,t(i)}$ and $W_{s(i),t(i)}$ for brevity. In this formulation, τ_1 estimates the direct effect of MTP on treated parents in hypothetical areas where no other parent is treated. The indirect effect of MTP, captured by exposure intensity $MTPI$, is allowed to vary by treatment status and is estimated by τ_2 and τ_3 for untreated and treated parents, respectively. To interpret our results, we assume that treated parents are not additionally affected by the spread of information from other treated neighbors. It follows that τ_3 purely reflects the competition channel of MTP, while τ_2 captures a combination of the competition and word-of-mouth channels. Table 5 presents estimates from Equation (3).

MTP increases competition for seats at local secondary schools. Estimates of τ_3 for participating schools are negative and statistically significant (column 1, Panel B). A one SD higher exposure to treated peers decreases enrollment at a participating school by 0.95 p.p. As expected, competition binds only at oversubscribed schools (columns 2-3), and does not bind in the public sector as a whole since a state school seat is guaranteed by law (Panel A).[30] Competition effects imply that the direct MTP impact on enrollment is larger than the net effect. Indeed, our estimate of τ_1 in Equation (3) is 3.6 p.p., almost three times larger than the net impact in Table 3, Panel B.

[30]We define a school as oversubscribed if the number of available seats is greater than the number of applicants who rank it as first choice (37% of secondary schools in London). This is a lower bound of actual oversubscription since applicants excluded from higher-preference schools are also on the list for admission. We proxy school-year capacity with the number of offers issued. The oversubscription indicator is computed in 2014, the first year for which preference data are available.

The MTP-driven spread of information through social interactions affects the school choice of untreated parents living in proximity to treated peers. Estimates of τ_2 for participating schools (Panel B) are positive on average (column 1) and strongly significant for oversubscribed schools (column 2). A one SD higher exposure to treated peers increases enrollment at participating schools by about 0.55 p.p. This estimate combines the information and word-of-mouth effects. Since competition effects are found to be negative, estimates of τ_2 can be interpreted as a lower bound of the word-of-mouth effect. Assuming that, on average, the competition effect is similar between exposed and unexposed parents, a one SD higher exposure to treated peers increases the enrollment of non-treated parents at participating schools by 1.5 p.p. $(= 0.55 + 0.95)$, about half the size of the program's direct impact. This implies that, in the absence of competition, the direct and indirect impacts of MTP would sum up to 5 p.p., 40% larger than the direct effect, pointing at a crucial role played by social interactions in school choice (Campos, 2023).

Overall, we find evidence of both information spreading through word-of-mouth and increased competition for local secondary schools. Enrolment effects for participating schools presented in the previous sections are likely underestimated since they do not factor in i) the increase in enrollment into participating schools stemming from untreated parents exposed to treated neighbors; and ii) competition effects in sought-after schools. Our results suggest that parents resort to word-of-mouth to inform school choice, consistent with other parents reportedly being among the main information sources (Panel A of Figure 4).

5.3 Parental demand for school attributes

In this section, we study how MTP interacts with parental demand for school attributes such as proximity, type, student composition, and academic performance. We compare the characteristics of the chosen school with those of other local secondary schools. The conceptual framework guiding this exercise is outlined in Appendix C. Departing from our framework, we consider the choice set of state schools only since data on private schools are not available. Since MTP provides an information treatment, its impacts on parental demand for school attributes suggest the directions in which parental beliefs changed as a result of the intervention.

We estimate how the MTP's impact interacts with school attributes in our DiD framework. We first build a dataset at the student-secondary-school level to mimic the choice problem faced by parents. Given the sharp decay of enrollment likelihood with distance, we keep student-school pairs within 5km from residence. We estimate the following specification:

$$Y_{ip} = \sum_{k=1}^{K} \omega_k W_p^k + \sum_{k=1}^{K} \pi_{0k} MTP_{s(i)} \cdot W_p^k + \sum_{k=1}^{K} \pi_{1k} MTP_{s(i),t(i)} \cdot W_p^k + \phi_{s(i)} + \phi_{t(i)} + \phi_{l(i)} + u_{ip}, \tag{4}$$

where Y_{ip} are dummies indicating student i's preference rank for and enrollment at secondary school p. These outcomes proxy parental indirect utility for school p, where coefficients on school attributes (W_p^k) represent the utility weights for the respective trait.[31] We allow parental demand to vary for parents in MTP schools before and after the intervention, as indicated by the dummies $MTP_{s(i)}$ and $MTP_{s(i),t(i)}$. The coefficients ω_k represent parental utility weights for school attribute k among parents in control schools, the coefficients π_{0k} the differential utility weights of parents in MTP schools before the intervention, and the coefficients π_{1k} the extra weights among parents exposed to the intervention. The notation otherwise follows Equation (1). The source of identifying variation is the same as in our main design, with school ($\phi_{s(i)}$) and year ($\phi_{t(i)}$) dummies isolating the DiD comparisons of parents exposed or not exposed to MTP around its kick-in.

Table 6 reports estimates of Equation (4) obtained by progressively including distance, school academic performance, school type (odd columns) and school composition (even columns). The comparison between enrollment (columns 1-2) and preference (columns 3-6) outcomes highlights the degree of competition for school seats, particularly in institutions with specific characteristics or among parents more inclined to opt for private sector enrollment.

[31] While, in principle, it is possible to employ an ordered logit model to fully exploit information from rank-order lists, in this context school ranking beyond the third position holds little significance. Notably, 70% of parents opt for their first choice, and 90% secure one of their top three preferences. The median number of schools ranked is 3. Consistently, Appendix Table A.4 show that using the top 3 school as the outcome indicator yields comparable conclusions. Moreover, MTP does not influence the number of schools ranked, and our findings remain robust even when controlling for this variable (results are available upon request).

Our estimates are in line with findings in the literature on school choice (e.g., Burgess et al., 2015). Estimates of the uninteracted coefficients of school attributes (ω_k in Equation 4) imply that longer distance to school discourages enrollment, with parents about 3.5 p.p. less likely to enroll (columns 1-2) or rank a school first (columns 3-4) when distance increases by one km, with even larger effects on the probability of ranking the school at all (columns 5-6; Bertoni et al., 2020). As expected, conditional on distance and type, parents are 1.5 p.p. more likely to enroll or rank a school first if academic performance is in the top quartile, and 6.5 p.p. more likely to rank it with any preference.[32] Conditional on other attributes, parents exhibit a lower demand for socio-economically diverse schools (those with a higher proportion of FSM and a lower proportion of natives), and faith and single-sex schools with respect to non-religious and coeducational institutions.

Parents targeted by MTP exhibit stronger preference for peer quality before the intervention. Estimated utility weights for parents in MTP schools (π_{0k} in Equation 4) show a higher propensity to rank top-performing school as first preference or to rank top-performing schools in their lists with respect to parents in control schools, although coefficients are not statistically significant. Parents in MTP schools are more likely to rank schools with lower shares of FSM eligible, black, or native peers first (6 p.p., 6 p.p., and 8 p.p., respectively). These estimates become larger when we consider the probability of ranking a school at all.

MTP broadly held parental preferences for attributes other than the school environment constant. Estimated utility weights for parents in MTP schools after the intervention (π_{1k} in Equation 4) show that MTP does not affect their propensity to rank top-performing schools first. The same finding applies to schools ranked in the top three positions, as reported in Table A.4. At the same time, MTP decreased the likelihood to rank top-performing schools at all in their list by 4 p.p., thereby lowering treated parents' taste for performance at the same level of control parents. Moreover, MTP did not shift parental preferences for school composition either. If anything, parents show a higher likelihood of ranking single-sex schools, more similar to what is commonly found in the private sector. These results suggest that the impacts of MTP on school choice, discussed in Section 5.1, operate

[32] Interestingly, once peer composition is controlled for, these estimates become substantially smaller (columns 2, 4, and 6), suggesting that peer quality plays a substantial role in determining parental response to school quality (MacLeod and Urquiola, 2019).

through unmeasured, *soft* school attributes. This aligns with our interpretation that parents acquire information about the school environment, confirming the descriptive evidence presented in Section 3.

6 Cost-Benefit Analysis

We now turn to the question of how the program's benefits for the secondary state-school system compare to the program's costs. Beyond providing parents with information they value, programs such as MTP represent an opportunity for secondary schools to raise additional resources and improve their finances. The calculations we present here represent merely an accounting exercise that abstracts from any general welfare statement. Full details on cost-benefit calculations can be found in Appendix E, and benefit-cost ratio estimates can be seen in Table E.1.

The positive impact of MTP on enrollment at state schools implies an increase in funding available in the public sector.[33] On average, one additional student enrolls at state schools per MTP meeting. The $2020-2021$ London average of the per-pupil secondary school funding allocation stands at £$6,913$. Assuming a constant effect of MTP throughout the period of our analysis after the pilot phase ($2014-2018$), we obtain an overall increase in funding of £$587,605$.

Increased enrollment also drives an increase in school costs. However, it is reasonable to assume that, at least in the short-term, it is not possible for schools to expand capacity, and therefore we abstract from spending on teaching and general staff and other "fixed costs," such as building maintenance. Under these assumptions, one additional pupil drives an increase of about £$1,520$ in running costs (£$129,200$ overall). Finally, secondary schools pay £380 to enter each meeting.

Overall, this exercise suggests that the state-school sector has largely benefited from MTP, with a net gain of about £$318,945$ over the five years of the program. The increase in school resources can benefit all state-school students and mitigate concerns about schools' financial viability. Simple and low-cost interventions that provide parents with valuable in-

[33] Total school funding for England, which is linked to the number of students enrolled, has been consistently growing over the past decade. The corresponding *per-pupil* school budget has remained relatively stable over the period of our analysis, ranging from $6,670$ ($2013/14$) to $6,550$ ($2019/20$) on average (in $2022/23$ figures). See here for the full set of statistics.

formation about school attributes they value can improve state-school finances and reduce concerns about school choice's adverse effects on educational stratification and inequality.

7 Conclusion

We investigate the impact of providing hard-to-find information on non-test score attributes on school choice in a non-experimental setting. We evaluate an intervention in the London Borough of Camden named Meet The Parents. This program offered parents valuable information about the school environment at local state secondary schools, which is typically challenging to obtain through conventional sources. Combining administrative data with survey evidence and text analysis of MTP meeting minutes, we document that parents are interested in several non-test score school attributes, such as discipline, inclusiveness, or safety, and, once provided with such information, they respond by changing their school choices. Using a DiD design, we find that MTP brings in more children in local state secondary schools. This effect underestimates the true shift in parental demand, as the program intensified competition for limited seats in nearby state schools.

Programs similar to MTP, which break down informational barriers, can offer parents valuable insights from insiders on specific aspects they value. Notably, our findings have broader applicability to settings with high socio-economic school inequality (see e.g., Billings et al., 2014), and extend beyond the private-state school divide. Low-cost interventions like MTP foster information exchange and enhance state-school finances and student composition. Since school accountability programs continue to expand globally, MTP-style interventions can alleviate concerns about the adverse effects of school choice on educational stratification and inequality (Hoxby, 2000; Andrabi et al., 2017). While Campos and Kearns (2023) finds that the introduction of school choice reduces spatial inequality in educational outcomes, we provide evidence on the potential inequality reduction effects of an informational intervention operating within an established school choice system.

We conclude with two final notes. First, beyond its impact on parental choice, MTP may also affect student academic achievement. Unfortunately, the lack of available data on end-of-high school exams precludes further investigation at present. Second, although

a scale-up of MTP is likely to financially benefit the state-education sector, whether this would also be beneficial from a welfare perspective depends on the general equilibrium effects of a program's expansion. Although studying these issues goes beyond the scope of the present paper, we hope to address them in future work.

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Tables

Table 1. Descriptive statistics for primary and secondary schools

	Primary schools			Secondary schools		
	Host schools	Non-host schools in Camden	Non-host schools in bordering LAs	Participating schools	Non-participating schools in Camden	Non-participating schools in bordering LAs
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
% Free school meal eligible	0.340	0.448	0.301	0.388	0.616	0.334
	(0.168)	(0.166)	(0.165)	(0.142)	(0.257)	(0.179)
% With special education needs	0.260	0.412	0.319	0.255	0.781	0.398
	(0.089)	(0.288)	(0.189)	(0.078)	(0.439)	(0.307)
% White	0.508	0.334	0.390	0.388	0.389	0.361
	(0.184)	(0.181)	(0.226)	(0.155)	(0.212)	(0.203)
% Native speaker	0.603	0.426	0.566	0.507	0.552	0.516
	(0.205)	(0.173)	(0.218)	(0.183)	(0.263)	(0.212)
End of school score in English (std)	0.188	-0.139	-0.081	0.090	-0.610	0.112
	(0.366)	(0.421)	(0.427)	(0.436)	(2.228)	(0.746)
End of school score in math (std)	0.157	-0.123	-0.042	0.120	-0.648	0.200
	(0.320)	(0.414)	(0.439)	(0.376)	(1.982)	(0.805)
Average school-home distance (km)	0.816	0.862	0.964	1.972	3.413	2.724
	(0.351)	(0.473)	(0.413)	(0.791)	(0.595)	(1.608)
Enrollment count per grade	39.627	29.29	46.077	162.719	52.277	141.186
	(13.632)	(16.481)	(22.182)	(42.019)	(86.998)	(80.652)
Observations	30	17	377	22	4	108

Note: This table shows descriptive statistics of primary and secondary school characteristics. Statistics are computed as school-level averages over the 2007–2013 period, preceding the introduction of MTP. Columns (1)–(3) describe primary schools, while columns (4)–(6) describe secondary schools. Host primary schools (column 1) are state schools organizing at least one MTP event between 2013–2018. Other primary schools in Camden and in bordering local authorities are described in column (2) and column (3), respectively. Column (4) shows statistics of state secondary schools participating in at least one MTP meeting between 2013–2018. Other secondary schools in Camden and in bordering local authorities are described in column (5) and column (6), respectively. End-of-school test scores are KS2 and KS4 test scores for primary and secondary schools, respectively. Standard deviations are reported in parentheses.

Table 2. Student-level descriptive statistics

	Students in treated schools		Students in control schools	
	mean (1)	S.D. (2)	mean (3)	S.D. (4)
Panel A: Enrollment sample				
Participating secondary	0.718	0.450	0.155	0.362
State-funded secondary	0.857	0.350	0.900	0.300
Distance to secondary school (km)	1.759	4.501	2.452	3.422
Female	0.492	0.500	0.492	0.500
Free school meal eligible	0.345	0.475	0.317	0.465
Special Education Needs	0.258	0.437	0.299	0.458
Native speaker	0.607	0.488	0.566	0.496
White	0.509	0.500	0.392	0.488
Asian	0.161	0.367	0.167	0.373
Black	0.170	0.376	0.246	0.431
Changed residence during KS2	0.250	0.433	0.282	0.450
KS2 test score in mathematics (std)	0.119	0.965	-0.013	1.017
KS2 test score in reading (std)	0.191	0.972	-0.018	1.020
Distance to primary school (km)	0.879	0.843	1.002	0.926
Income deprivation index (LSOA level)	0.401	0.184	0.403	0.212
Observations (2007-2013)	9,438		98,943	
Panel B: Preference sample				
Any preference for state-funded school	0.982	0.131	0.971	0.167
Accepted an offer in any state funded school	0.704	0.457	0.798	0.402
N. ranked schools	3.716	1.692	3.474	1.777
Any preference for participating school	0.959	0.199	0.403	0.49
Accepted an offer in a participating school	0.59	0.492	0.139	0.346
First preference for a participating school	0.763	0.426	0.157	0.364
Observations (2014)	797		11,826	

Note: This table shows descriptive statistics of students' outcomes and characteristics at baseline, i.e. before any MTP meeting. The sample is a repeated cross-section of students completing primary education in Camden or bordering school districts. Panel A reports statistics using the enrollment sample (baseline period: 2007–2013), Panel B uses the preference sample (baseline year: 2014). Treated pupils are those attending schools with at least one MTP meeting between 2013–2018 (for the preference sample, between 2015 and 2018). Control pupils are those attending primary schools located in Camden or in the neighboring LAs which never held an MTP meeting.

Table 3. Average effects of MTP on school enrollment

	Dependent variable: Enrollment indicator at secondary school		
	(1)	(2)	(3)
	Panel A: State schools		
MTP_s	-0.057***		
	(0.018)		
MTP_s,t	0.034**	0.025**	0.024**
	(0.017)	(0.010)	(0.010)
	Panel B: Participating schools		
MTP_s	0.157***		
	(0.036)		
MTP_s,t	0.050**	0.015	0.014
	(0.021)	(0.013)	(0.012)
Observations	180,398	180,398	180,398
Year, Census block FE	Y	Y	Y
Primary school FE	N	Y	Y
Individual and primary school controls	N	N	Y

Note: The table shows DiD estimates of the impacts of MTP on enrollment at a secondary state school (Panel A) or a participating school (Panel B). Column (1) controls for year FEs and census block (LSOA) FEs; column (2) adds school FEs; column (3) adds controls for individual characteristics (gender, ethnicity, language spoken at home, FSM eligibility, and special educational needs), school and block characteristics (quadratic polynomials in enrollment and number of children, respectively), and mean (log) house prices at the census block level. Standard errors are clustered on primary schools and reported in parentheses. *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1.

Table 4. Average effects of MTP on school preferences

	Dependent variable: preference or enrollment indicator for secondary school						
	Any preference		First choice	Accepted an offer		Enrollment	
	for a state school	for a participating school	at a participating school	in any state school	in a participating school	at a state school	at a participating school
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)
MTP_s,t	-0.005*	0.005	-0.018	0.064***	0.053***	0.048***	0.043**
	(0.003)	(0.007)	(0.012)	(0.019)	(0.019)	(0.015)	(0.020)
Observations	64,646	64,646	64,646	62,844	62,844	64,646	64,646
Year, Census block FE	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Primary school FE	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Individual and primary school characteristics	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y

Note: The table shows DiD estimates of MTP's impact on school preferences. Treated schools are restricted to those entering MTP from 2015 onwards, to reflect the availability of school preference data from 2014. All specifications include control variables similar to column (3) of Table 3. Outcomes are indicators for: any application in a state or in a participating secondary school (columns 1 and 2, resp.); ranking a participating school as first choice (column 3); school offer take-up in a state or in a participating secondary school (columns 4 and 5, resp.). Columns (6)-(7) replicate estimates in Panel A and B, column (3), of Table 3 in the subsample with school preference data. Standard errors are clustered on schools and reported in parentheses. *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1.

Table 5. Competition and word-of-mouth channels

	Dependent variable: Enrollment indicator at secondary school		
	All schools	Oversubscribed schools	Undersubscribed schools
	(1)	(2)	(3)
	Panel A. State-funded schools		
MTP	0.0228**	0.0302	-0.0302
	(0.0104)	(0.0248)	(0.0248)
MTPI	0.0008	0.0056	-0.0056
	(0.0014)	(0.0035)	(0.0035)
MTP * MTPI	-0.0002	-0.0056	0.0056
	(0.0024)	(0.0042)	(0.0042)
	Panel B. Participating schools		
MTP	0.0361	0.0443**	-0.0293
	(0.0222)	(0.0218)	(0.0259)
MTPI	0.0055*	0.0090***	-0.0038
	(0.0032)	(0.0028)	(0.0044)
MTP * MTPI	-0.0095**	-0.0100***	-0.0005
	(0.0045)	(0.0034)	(0.0056)
Observations	164,938	144,198	144,198
Year, Census block (LSOA) FE	Y	Y	Y
Primary school FE	Y	Y	Y
Individual and primary school characteristics	Y	Y	Y

Note: The table shows DID estimates of the direct and indirect effects of MTP on enrollment at a secondary state school (Panel A) or a participating school (Panel B). Reported are estimates of Equation (3). $MTPI_i$ measures the share of students residing in i's block who are exposed to MTP (standardised within the sample). Dependent variables in columns (2) and (3) are indicators for enrollment into oversubscribed and undersubscribed schools, respectively. We define a school as oversubscribed if the number of available seats is greater than the number of applicants who rank it as a first choice (37% of secondary schools in London). All specifications include control variables similar to column (3) of Table 3. Standard errors are clustered on schools and reported in parentheses. *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1.

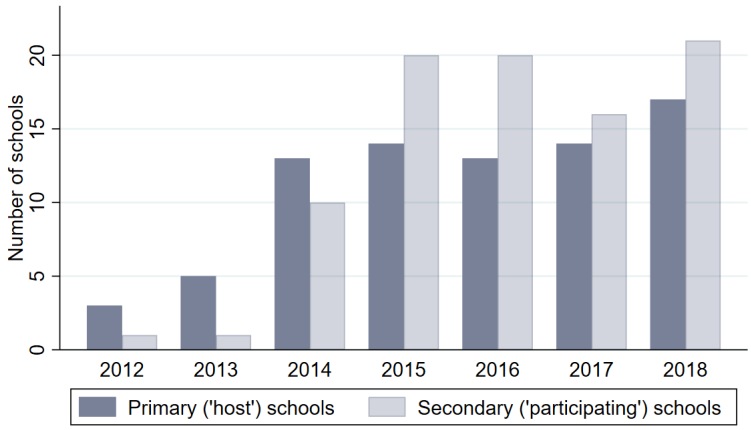
Table 6. Parental demand for school attributes

	Dependent variable: preference indicator for secondary school					
	Enrollment at the school		School of first choice		School ranked	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Distance (in km)	-0.0331***	-0.0333***	-0.0341***	-0.0342***	-0.0820***	-0.0821***
	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.002)	(0.002)
MTP_s * Distance (in km)	-0.0026	-0.0024	0.0026	0.0026	0.0001	0.0018
	(0.002)	(0.002)	(0.002)	(0.003)	(0.003)	(0.004)
MTP_s,t * Distance (in km)	0.0002	0.0007	-0.0013**	-0.0033**	-0.0020*	-0.0016
	(0.000)	(0.001)	(0.000)	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.002)
Top performing	0.0145***	0.0083**	0.0165***	0.0017	0.0641***	0.0234***
	(0.003)	-0.004	(0.004)	(0.004)	(0.006)	(0.008)
MTP_s * Top performing	0.0005	-0.0088	0.0142	0.0068	0.0612	0.0379
	(0.005)	(0.006)	(0.010)	(0.009)	(0.039)	(0.031)
MTP_s,t * Top performing	0.0046	0.0033	-0.002	0.0027	-0.0448**	-0.0384*
	(0.005)	(0.006)	(0.005)	(0.005)	(0.020)	(0.020)
Faith	-0.0133***	-0.0134***	-0.0079**	-0.0119***	-0.0462***	-0.0613***
	(0.003)	(0.003)	(0.003)	(0.003)	(0.008)	(0.008)
Single sex	-0.0049**	-0.0038	-0.0153***	-0.0133***	-0.0597***	-0.0552***
	(0.002)	(0.002)	(0.002)	(0.002)	(0.005)	(0.004)
MTP_s * Faith	-0.0006	0.0017	-0.0083*	-0.0022	-0.0168	-0.011
	(0.004)	(0.004)	(0.004)	(0.005)	(0.011)	(0.011)
MTP_s * Single sex	0.0045	0.0046	-0.0001	0.0024	0.0027	0.0116
	(0.006)	(0.006)	(0.010)	(0.009)	(0.030)	(0.026)
MTP_s,t * Faith	0.0003	-0.0006	0.0038	0.0005	0.0150*	0.0107
	(0.002)	(0.003)	(0.004)	(0.005)	(0.008)	(0.008)
MTP_s,t * Single sex	0.0018	0.0026	0.0090*	0.0079	0.0371**	0.0358**
	(0.004)	(0.004)	(0.005)	(0.005)	(0.015)	(0.016)
Share of FSM		-0.0048		-0.0372***		-0.1207***
		(0.012)		(0.011)		(0.022)
Share of natives		0.0134*		0.0318***		0.0923***
		(0.007)		(0.008)		(0.019)
Share of Black		-0.0219***		-0.0197***		-0.0166
		(0.007)		(0.009)		(0.024)
Share of Asian		0.0161		0.0349***		0.0945***
		(0.013)		(0.013)		(0.032)
MTP_s * Share of FSM		-0.0307		-0.0581***		-0.1214***
		(0.022)		(0.023)		(0.052)
MTP_s * Share of natives		-0.0030		-0.0635***		-0.1334**
		(0.020)		(0.024)		(0.055)
MTP_s * Share of Black		-0.0532***		-0.0813**		-0.2686***
		(0.019)		(0.033)		(0.072)
MTP_s * Share of Asian		0.0127		-0.0486		-0.1748
		(0.034)		(0.045)		(0.123)
MTP_s,t * Share of FSM		-0.0009		-0.0004		-0.0358
		(0.009)		(0.012)		(0.031)
MTP_s,t * Share of natives		0.0053		0.0029		-0.0047
		(0.008)		(0.007)		(0.012)
MTP_s,t * Share of Black		0.0107		0.0207		0.0253
		(0.008)		(0.013)		(0.034)
MTP_s,t * Share of Asian		-0.0054		0.0105		0.0647
		(0.013)		(0.018)		(0.053)
Observations	4,111,398	4,111,398	1,231,184	1,231,184	1,231,184	1,231,184

Note: The table reports estimates from Equation (4). The dataset is constructed at the student-school level by pairing students in our sample with each state school in Camden or bordering LAs. We exclude student-school pairs beyond 5km of home. The dependent variables are a dummy indicating student enrollment at the considered school (columns 1-2), ranking the school as the first choice (columns 3-4), ranking the school with any preference (columns 5-6). Columns (3)-(6) restrict the sample to students with school preference data as in Table 4. School composition variables are computed in 2009, before the first treated cohort begins the final year of KS2. A school is defined as top-performing if average KS4 test scores are above the 75th percentile in the sample. Standard errors are clustered on schools and reported in parentheses. *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1.

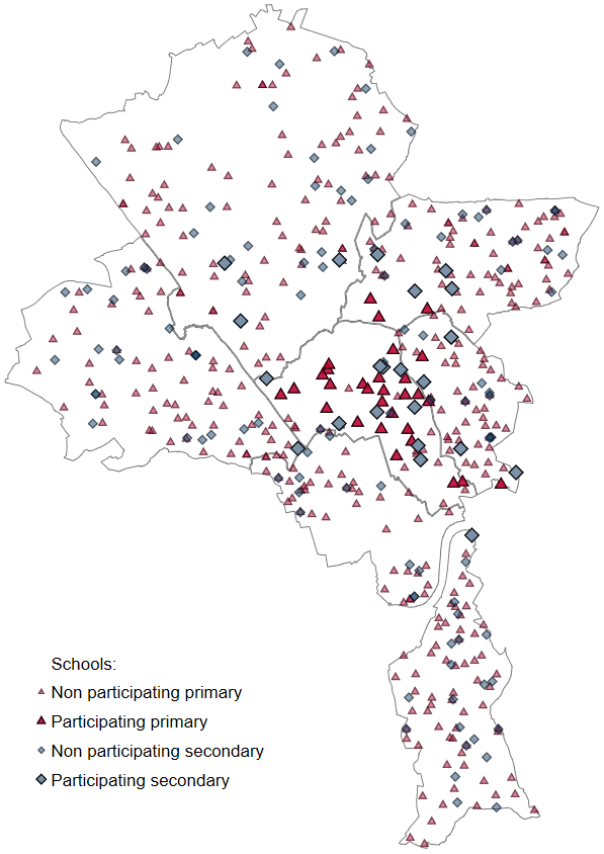
Figures

Figure 1. Rollout of MTP



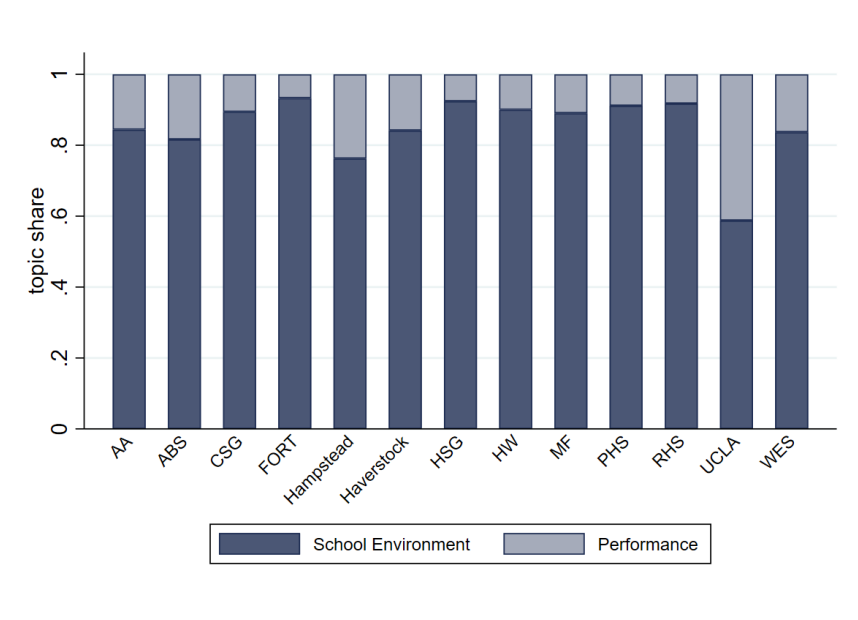
Note: The figure shows the number of primary and secondary schools hosting/participating in the MTP program by meeting year.

Figure 2. Geographical location of host and participating schools



Note: The figure plots the location (based on school postcode centroids) of state primary and secondary schools. Markers indicate primary school hosting or not hosting an MTP event, and secondary schools participating or not participating to an MTP event. Shown are the borough of Camden and its neighboring boroughs (in clockwise order, Islington, Lambeth, Westminster, Brent, Barnet, Haringey). Among the 30 host schools, 25 were located in the district of Camden, 2 in Islington, and 3 in Haringey.

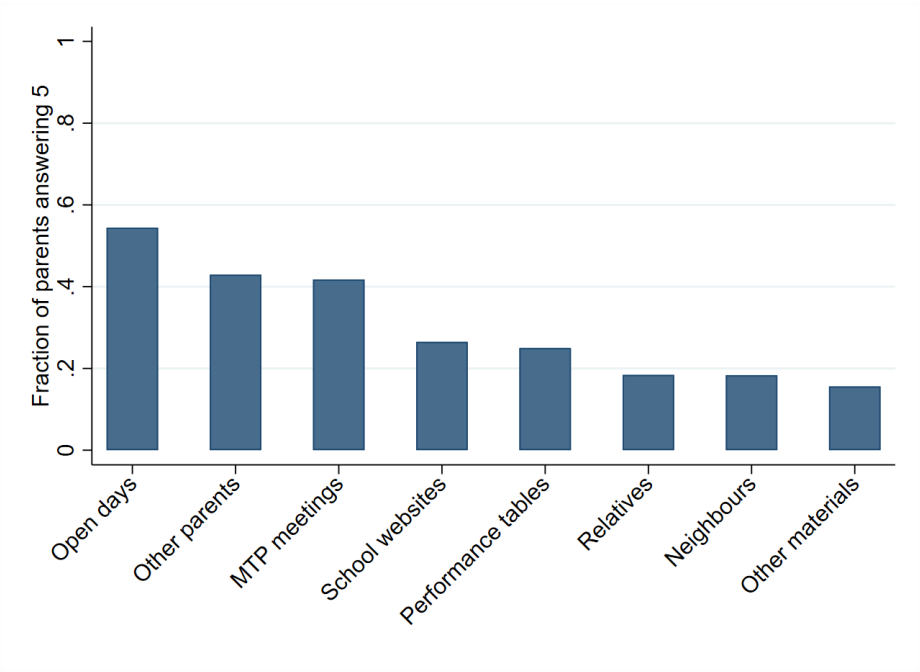
Figure 3. Content of MTP meetings using LDA



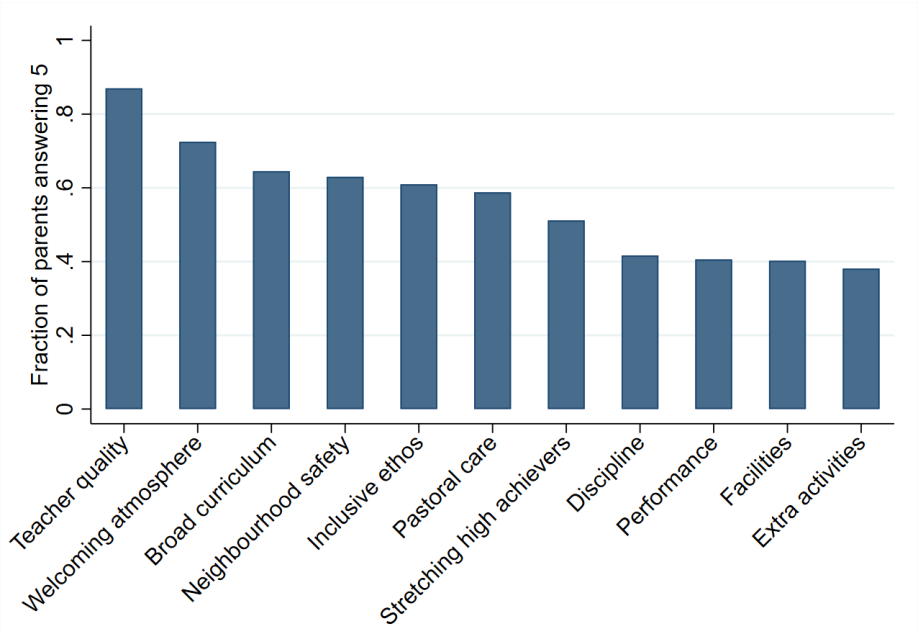
Note: The figure shows the share of topics discussed during MTP meetings. Categorization of topics in "school environment", and "performance" is done using the Latent Dirichlet Allocation (LDA, see Appendix D.1 for full details). Words were extracted from 2014 – 2018 MTP meeting minutes. Meeting minutes are available for a subset of participating secondary schools (13 out of 22). The meeting-level average share of environment topic is 82%. Table A.1 provides the full school names.

Figure 4. Survey evidence on parental choice

Panel A. Sources of information

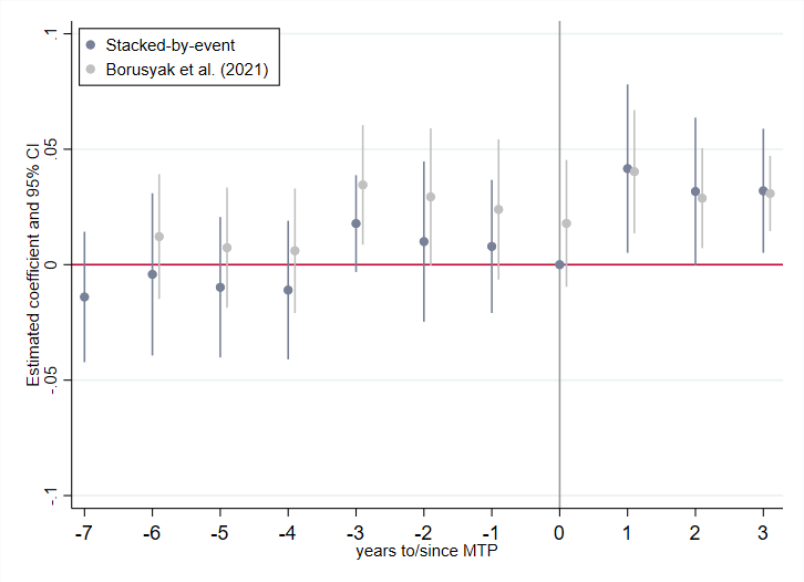


Panel B. School attributes valued by parents



Note: The figure shows the fraction of parents valuing different sources of information (Panel A) and different school attributes (Panel B) when they choose a secondary school. Panel A plots the share of respondents who answered 5 to the following question: *"How much do you rely on the following sources of information?"*. Panel B plots the share of respondents who answered 5 to the following question: *"How much do you value the following features in your choice of secondary school?"*. Scale: 1 = not at all and 5 = a lot. Answers were collected through a survey administered to parents attending MTP meetings in 2019. See Figures A.2 and A.3 for the template of the questionnaire. Figure A.4 shows the frequency distribution of the responses for each value of the scale.

Figure 5. Event study of state school enrollment



Note: The figure shows the event graph of student enrollment in state schools around the time of entrance into the MTP program. Time on the horizontal axis is computed by subtracting the year when a given school entered MTP from the year of the observation. The figure plots the time-specific coefficient of MTP treatment effect estimated from Equation (2), along with 95% confidence intervals, using the stacked design (Deshpande and Li, 2019) and the estimator developed by Borusyak et al. (2021) with light blue and gray bars, respectively. For the latter, we use periods before -6 as the reference group. P-values of the F-test for the joint significance of pre-conversion coefficients are 0.35 (stacked design) and 0.27 (Borusyak et al., 2021). When applying the stacked design, we bin relative times for $k < 7$ and $k > 3$, assuming constant treatment effects within the bin, as suggested by Sun and Abraham (2021). See Section 4 for details.

Appendix A Additional Tables and Figures

Table A.1. Oversubscription criteria for participating secondary schools

School	Admission authority	Sex	Banding	Priority:					
				First	Second	Third	Fourth	Fifth	Sixth
(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)	(10)
Parliament Hill School (PHS)	LA	All	NO	LA children	Siblings	Social/medical need	Staff		
Acland Burghley School (ABS)	LA	All	NO	LA children	Siblings	Social/medical need	Staff		
William Ellis School (WES)	LA	All	NO	LA children	Siblings	Social/medical need		Staff	
Arts & Media School Islington (AMSI)	LA	All	NO	LA children	Siblings	Social/medical need			
Holloway	LA	All	NO	LA children	Siblings	Social/medical need			
Central Foundation Boys School	School	Boys	YES	LA children	Siblings	Social/medical need			
Elizabeth Garrett Anderson School (EGA)	LA	Girls	NO	LA children	Siblings	Social/medical need			
The London Nautical School	School	All	NO	LA children	Siblings	Social/medical need			
Regent High School (RHS)	LA	All	NO	LA children	Siblings	Social/medical need			
The UCL Academy (UCLA)	School	All	NO	LA children	Siblings	Social/medical need		Staff	
Haverstock School	LA	All	NO	LA children	Siblings	Social/medical need			
Hampstead School	LA	All	NO	LA children	Siblings	Social/medical need		Staff	
Camden School for Girls (CSG)	School	Girls	YES	LA children	Siblings	Social/medical need			
Maria Fidelis (MF)	School	All	NO	Catholic LA	Catholic practice	Baptised	LA children	Orthodox Churches	Other Christians
St Mary's and St John's School (SMSJ)	School	All	YES	Feeder school	LA children	Social/medical need	Siblings	Staff	Catholic children (50%)
St. Augustine's High School	School	All	YES	LA children	Catholic/christian practice	Social/medical need	Religious practice	Feeder school	Siblings
Fortismere School (FORT)	School	All	NO	LA children	Social/medical need	Siblings	Staff		
Greig City Academy	School	All	NO	LA children	Social/medical need				
Highgate Wood School (HW)	LA	All	NO	LA children	Social/medical need	Siblings		Staff	
Hornsey Girls School (HSG)	LA	Girls	NO	LA children	Social/medical need	Siblings		Staff	
The Archer Academy (AA)	School	All	NO	LA children	Founders' children	Siblings	Staff	Catchment area (stratified)	
Whitefield School	School	All	NO	LA children	Social/medical need	Siblings	Staff		

Note: This table shows oversubscription criteria of secondary schools participating in MTP meetings. The admission authority is the LA or the school's governing body. Schools with banding admit equal shares of children from different ability bands (typically four) assessed by ad-hoc tests to represent a diverse intake. Looked-after children are a small group of particularly vulnerable children whose prioritization is required. Among children with equal priorities, most schools break ties using home-school distance. There are few exceptions to the proximity criterion: siblings of current students; religion (in faith schools only); SAT performance (in grammar schools only, virtually absent in our context). Secondary schools are sometimes linked to "feeder" primary schools, whose pupils gain admission priority to the linked secondary school. Among those participating in MTP, only one secondary school has a feeder institution (St Mary's and St John's School). Other exceptions are the London Nautical School, which runs a lottery, and St Augustine's High School, which has an additional priority given to other Catholic primary schools.

Table A.2. MTP meetings by hosting and participating schools' test scores

Participating secondary school test scores	*Host primary school test scores* 1st tercile	2nd tercile	3rd tercile	
1st tercile	20	19	10	**49**
2nd tercile	13	20	13	**46**
3rd tercile	13	18	12	**43**
	46	**57**	**35**	**138**

Note: The table shows frequency counts of MTP meetings by test scores of participating secondary and host primary schools. Each observation represents a host-participating group pair. Both groups of schools are grouped in terciles of final-year academic performance (KS2 scores for host schools, KS4 scores for participating schools) computed using observations for the baseline period (i.e., before 2013).

Table A.3. Selection of participating schools into MTP

Dep. Var.: Participation to MTP	Characteristics:		
	Level (baseline)	2007-2012	2010-2012
	(1)	(2)	(3)
% Free school meal eligible	-0.104	-0.001	-0.022
	(0.082)	(0.069)	(0.059)
% White	-0.118	-0.080	0.022
	(0.090)	(0.073)	(0.043)
% Asian	-0.046	0.046	0.079
	(0.070)	(0.066)	(0.071)
% Black	-0.136	-0.011	0.032
	(0.098)	(0.030)	(0.022)
% Native speaker	-0.075	0.099	0.040
	(0.037)	(0.064)	(0.063)
End of school score in English (std)	-0.004	0.002	0.018
	(0.070)	(0.054)	(0.037)
End of school score in mathematics (std)	-0.054	0.062	0.058
	(0.067)	(0.085)	(0.051)
Observations	82	68	72
Fixed effects	LA	LA	LA

Note: The table shows estimates of regressions that correlate baseline school characteristics with the decision of a secondary school to participate in MTP. The dependent variable is an indicator variable taking a value of 1 for secondary schools that participate in MTP. In column (1) we regress this indicator on school characteristics measured in levels at baseline (2007). Columns (2) and (3) consider instead short-term ($2010-2012$) and long-term ($2007-2012$) changes in the same characteristics, respectively. The sample includes less schools than Table 1 (columns (4) to (6)) because of missing data for the schools in the years considered. The sample is restricted to schools located in our sample of LAs. All columns control for LA FEs. All independent variables are standardized to have zero mean and unit variance. Standard errors are clustered on LAs and reported in parentheses. *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1.

Table A.4. Parental demand for school attributes in top three ranked schools

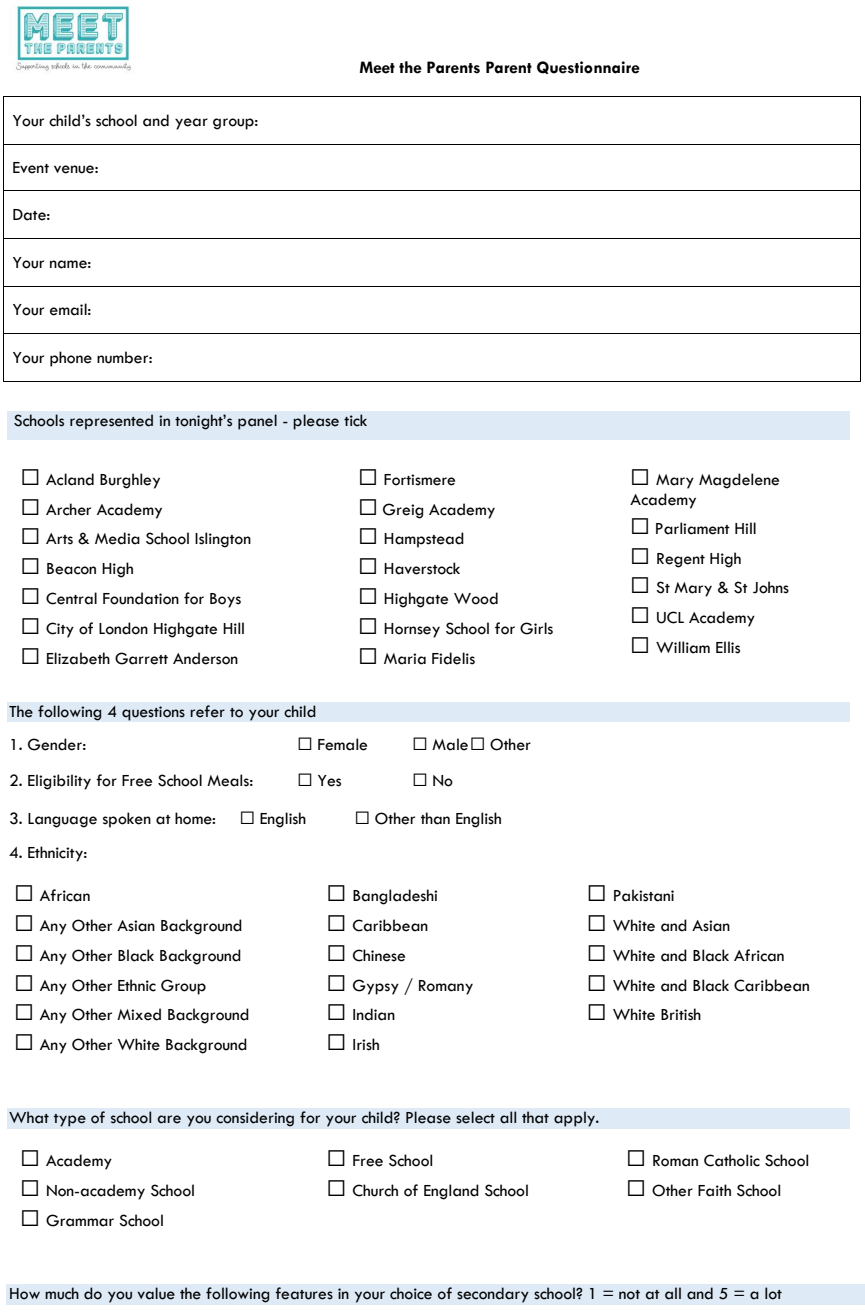
	Dependent variable: preference indicator for secondary school	
	Top three ranked schools	
	(1)	(2)
Distance (in km)	-0.0677***	-0.0678***
	(0.002)	(0.002)
MTP_i * Distance (in km)	0.0009	0.0001
	(0.004)	(0.004)
MTP_i,t * Distance (in km)	-0.0019**	-0.0036
	(0.001)	(0.002)
Top performing	0.0507***	0.0180**
	(0.006)	(0.007)
MTP_i * Top performing	0.0555	0.0365
	(0.035)	(0.028)
MTP_i,t * Top performing	-0.0351*	-0.0251
	(0.018)	(0.018)
Faith	-0.0303***	-0.0423***
	(0.006)	(0.007)
Single sex	-0.0447***	-0.0406***
	(0.004)	(0.004)
MTP_i * Faith	-0.0147	-0.0023
	(0.009)	(0.009)
MTP_i * Single sex	-0.0049	0.003
	(0.028)	(0.025)
MTP_i,t * Faith	0.0104	0.0068
	(0.007)	(0.009)
MTP_i,t * Single sex	0.0336**	0.0316**
	(0.014)	(0.014)
Share of FSM		-0.0819***
		(0.019)
Share of natives		0.0840***
		(0.016)
Share of Black		-0.0223
		(0.019)
Share of Asian		0.0757***
		(0.026)
MTP_i * Share of FSM		-0.1296***
		(0.042)
MTP_i * Share of natives		-0.1340***
		(0.045)
MTP_i * Share of Black		-0.2107***
		(0.067)
MTP_i * Share of Asian		-0.1577
		(0.103)
MTP_i,t * Share of FSM		-0.0089
		(0.027)
MTP_i,t * Share of natives		-0.0077
		(0.009)
MTP_i,t * Share of Black		0.0275
		(0.031)
MTP_i,t * Share of Asian		0.0402
		(0.042)
Observations	1,231,184	1,231,184

Note: The table shows DiD estimates of the impact of MTP on parental demand for school attributes. All specifications use the same dataset and add the same control variables as column (4) of Table 6. The dependent variable is a dummy indicating ranking the school as the first, second or third choice. The median number of school ranked is 3 (the average is 3.55). Standard errors are clustered on schools and reported in parentheses. *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1.

Figure A.1. MTP Meetings: panellists and attendees

Note: The pictures shows a few examples of the structure of MTP meetings.

Figure A.2. Questionnaire administered to parents during MTP meetings (page 1)



Meet the Parents Parent Questionnaire

Your child's school and year group:
Event venue:
Date:
Your name:
Your email:
Your phone number:

Schools represented in tonight's panel - please tick

- ☐ Acland Burghley
- ☐ Archer Academy
- ☐ Arts & Media School Islington
- ☐ Beacon High
- ☐ Central Foundation for Boys
- ☐ City of London Highgate Hill
- ☐ Elizabeth Garrett Anderson
- ☐ Fortismere
- ☐ Greig Academy
- ☐ Hampstead
- ☐ Haverstock
- ☐ Highgate Wood
- ☐ Hornsey School for Girls
- ☐ Maria Fidelis
- ☐ Mary Magdelene Academy
- ☐ Parliament Hill
- ☐ Regent High
- ☐ St Mary & St Johns
- ☐ UCL Academy
- ☐ William Ellis

The following 4 questions refer to your child

1. Gender: ☐ Female ☐ Male ☐ Other
2. Eligibility for Free School Meals: ☐ Yes ☐ No
3. Language spoken at home: ☐ English ☐ Other than English
4. Ethnicity:

- ☐ African
- ☐ Any Other Asian Background
- ☐ Any Other Black Background
- ☐ Any Other Ethnic Group
- ☐ Any Other Mixed Background
- ☐ Any Other White Background
- ☐ Bangladeshi
- ☐ Caribbean
- ☐ Chinese
- ☐ Gypsy / Romany
- ☐ Indian
- ☐ Irish
- ☐ Pakistani
- ☐ White and Asian
- ☐ White and Black African
- ☐ White and Black Caribbean
- ☐ White British

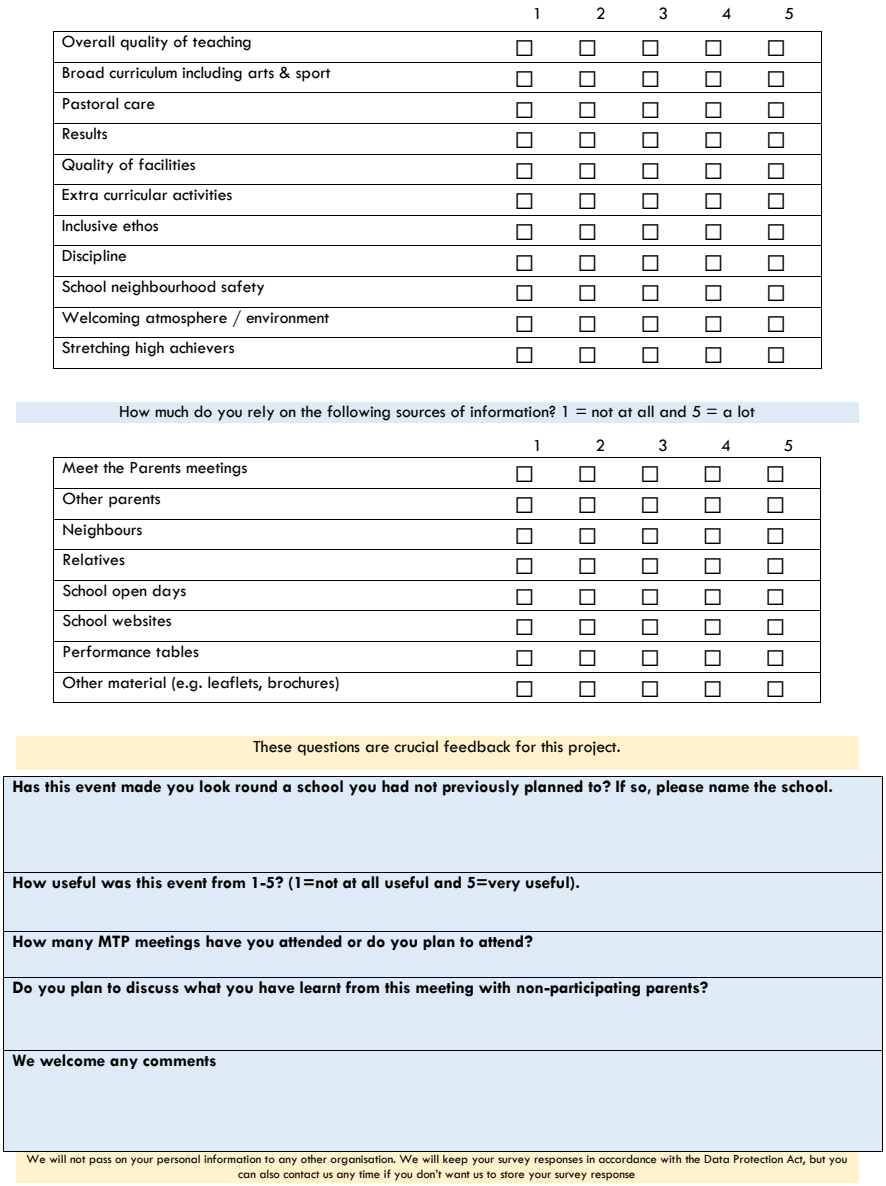
What type of school are you considering for your child? Please select all that apply.

- ☐ Academy
- ☐ Non-academy School
- ☐ Grammar School
- ☐ Free School
- ☐ Church of England School
- ☐ Roman Catholic School
- ☐ Other Faith School

How much do you value the following features in your choice of secondary school? 1 = not at all and 5 = a lot

Note: The figure shows the template of the questionnaire administered to parents (page 1).

Figure A.3. Questionnaire administered to parents during MTP meetings (page 2)



	1	2	3	4	5
Overall quality of teaching	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Broad curriculum including arts & sport	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Pastoral care	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Results	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Quality of facilities	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Extra curricular activities	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Inclusive ethos	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Discipline	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
School neighbourhood safety	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Welcoming atmosphere / environment	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Stretching high achievers	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

How much do you rely on the following sources of information? 1 = not at all and 5 = a lot

	1	2	3	4	5
Meet the Parents meetings	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Other parents	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Neighbours	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Relatives	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
School open days	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
School websites	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Performance tables	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Other material (e.g. leaflets, brochures)	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

These questions are crucial feedback for this project.

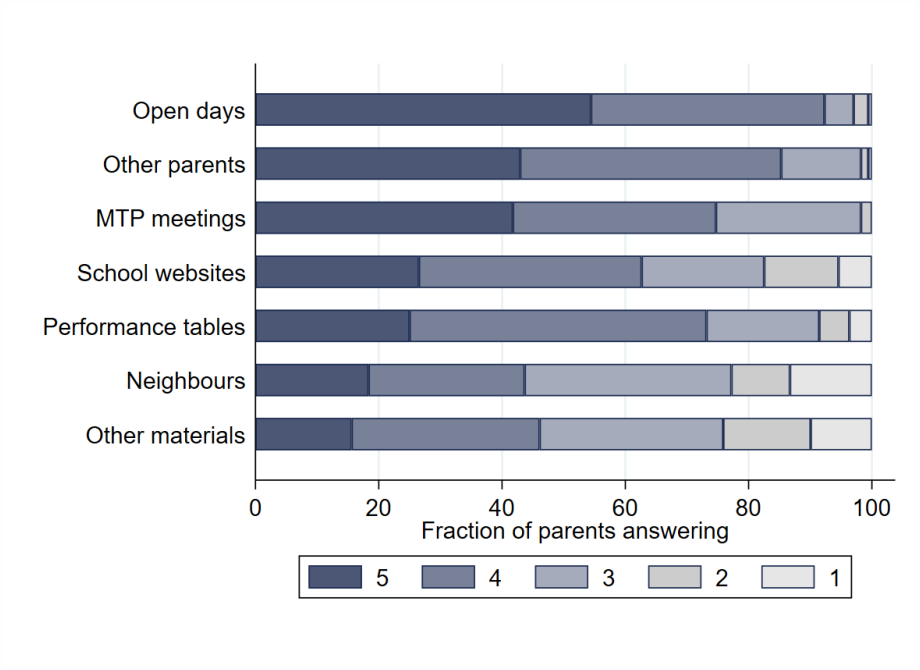
Has this event made you look round a school you had not previously planned to? If so, please name the school.
How useful was this event from 1-5? (1=not at all useful and 5=very useful).
How many MTP meetings have you attended or do you plan to attend?
Do you plan to discuss what you have learnt from this meeting with non-participating parents?
We welcome any comments

We will not pass on your personal information to any other organisation. We will keep your survey responses in accordance with the Data Protection Act, but you can also contact us any time if you don't want us to store your survey response

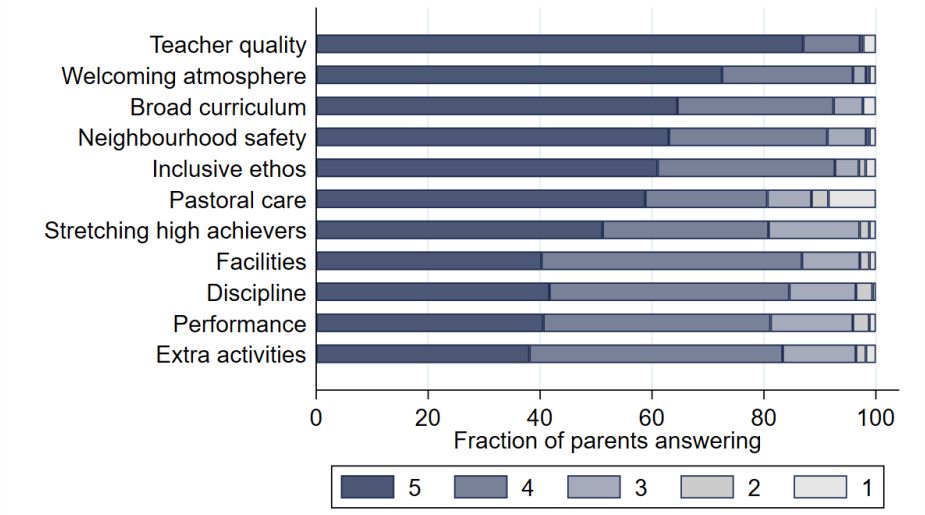
Note: The figure shows the template of the questionnaire administered to parents (page 2).

Figure A.4. Frequency distribution of survey responses

Panel A. Sources of information

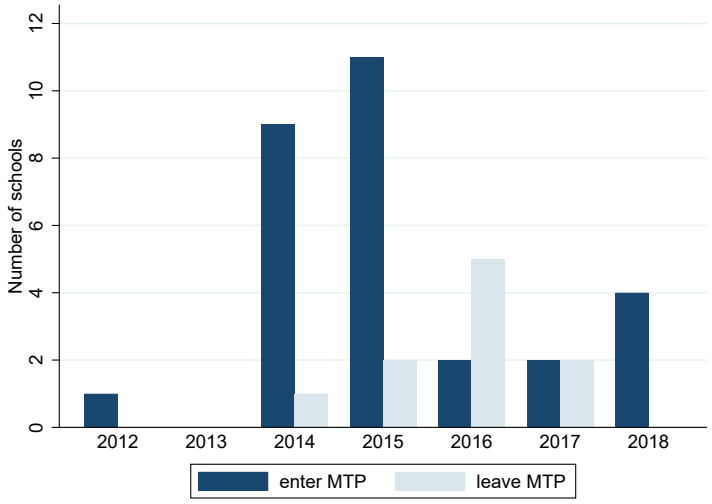


Panel B. School attributes valued by parents



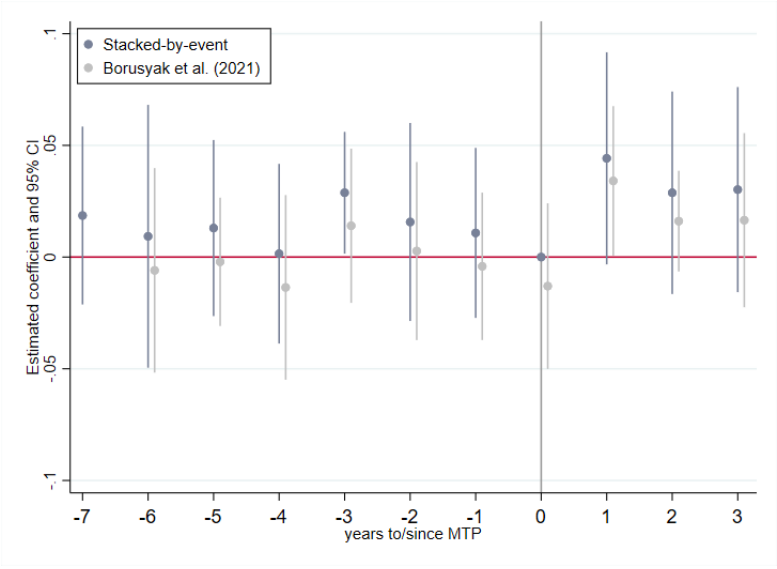
Note: The figure shows the fraction of parents valuing different sources of information (Panel A) and different school attributes (Panel B) when they choose a secondary school for their children. Panel A plots the share of respondents who answered to the following question: *"How much do you rely on the following sources of information? 1 = not at all and 5 = a lot"*. Panel B plots the share of respondents who answered to the following question: *"How much do you value the following features in your choice of secondary school? 1 = not at all and 5 = a lot"*. Answers were collected through a survey administered to parents attending MTP meetings in 2019. Both panels plot the frequency distribution of responses for each value of the scale (from 1 to 5).

Figure A.5. Number of schools entering and leaving MTP



Note: The figure shows the number of schools entering and leaving MTP by year.

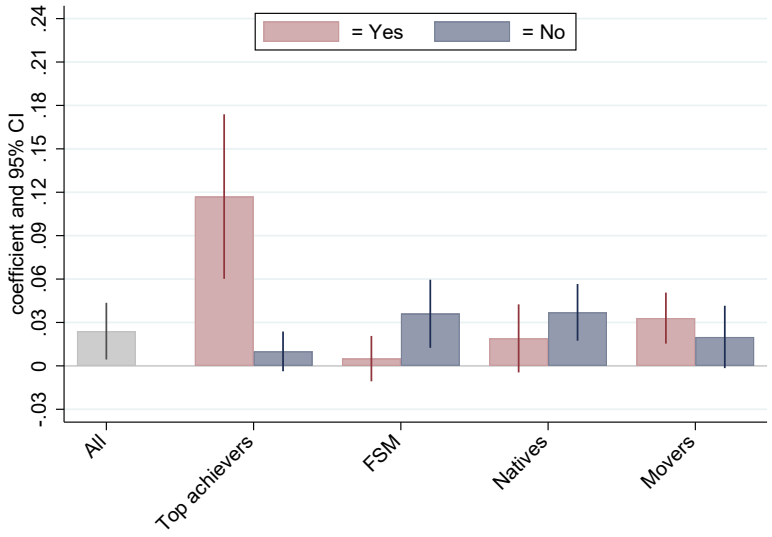
Figure A.6. Event study of participating school enrollment



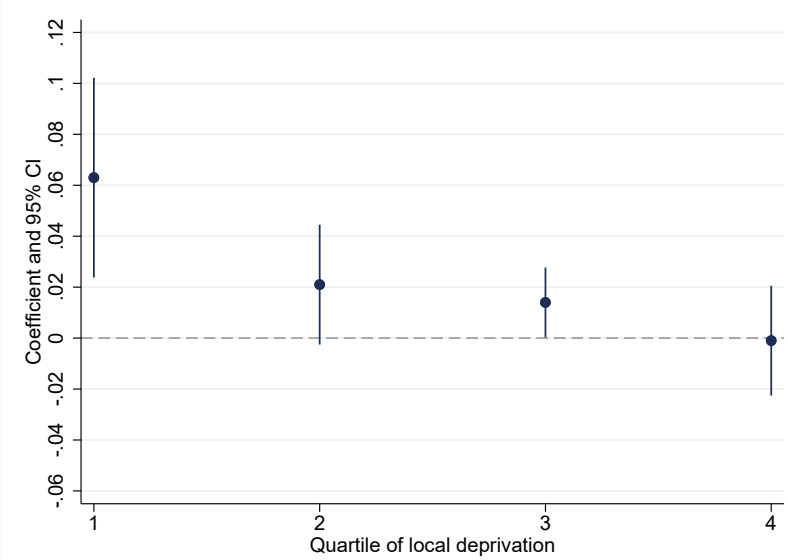
Note: The figures show the event graph of student enrollment in participating schools around the time of entrance into the MTP program. Time on the horizontal axis is computed by subtracting the year when a given school entered MTP from the year of the observation. The figures plot time-specific coefficients of MTP treatment effect estimated from Equation (2), along with 95% confidence intervals, using the stacked design (Deshpande and Li, 2019) and the estimator developed by Borusyak et al. (2021) with light blue and gray bars, respectively. For the latter, we use periods before -6 as the reference group. When applying the stacked design, we bin relative times for $k < 7$ and $k > 3$, assuming constant treatment effects within the bin, as suggested by Sun and Abraham (2021). See Section 4 for details.

Figure A.7. Heterogeneous effects on state school enrollment

Panel A. Effects by individual characteristics



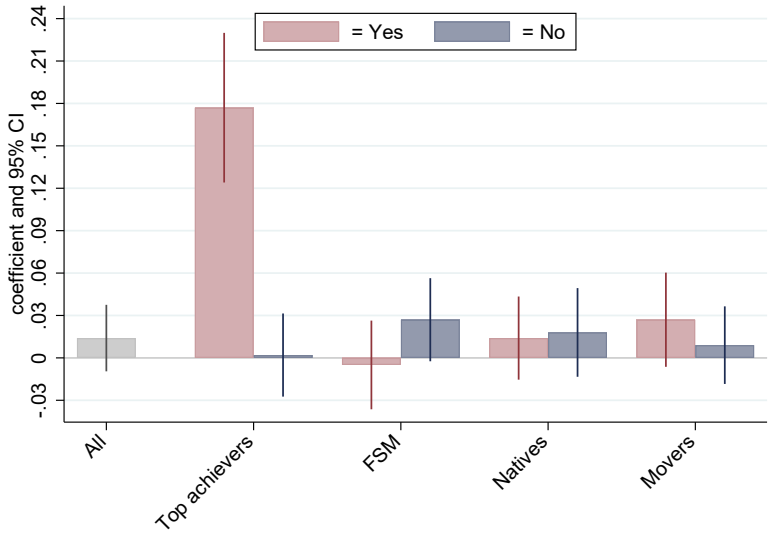
Panel B. Effects by local area deprivation



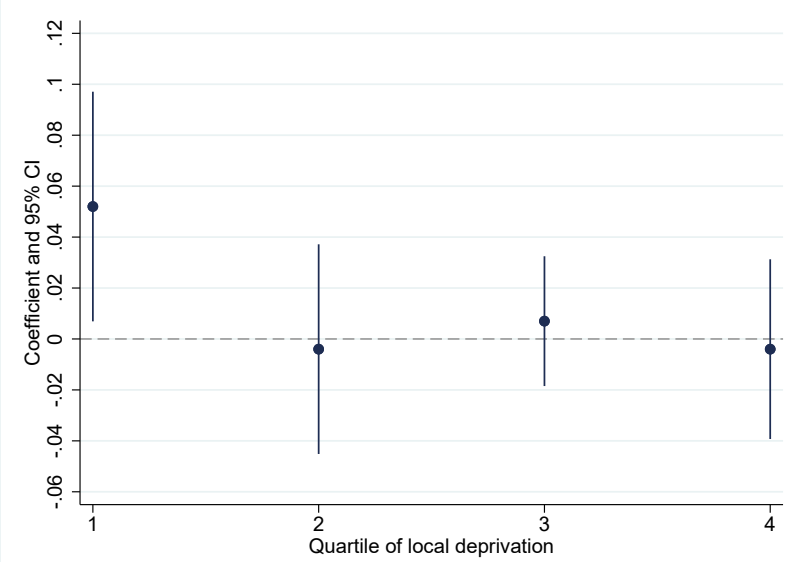
Note: The figures show DID estimates of the impact of MTP on the probability of enrolling at a state secondary school. The sample is formed by students completing primary education in Camden or bordering school districts. In Panel A, the first bar shows the average treatment effect of MTP (corresponding to column (3) of Table 3). All the estimates in the other columns are obtained by stratifying the sample based on the specified student characteristics. Top achievers are students whose standardized test scores (in reading) are above the 75th percentile. We define "movers" as students whose postcode of residence changed during years 3 to 6 of primary school (25% of our sample). Panel B plots quartiles of local area deprivation on the horizontal axis. Deprivation is measured by the IDACI index, based on average family income in the LSOA and measured in 2011. All regressions include controls similar to column (4) of Table 3. Standard errors are clustered on schools.

Figure A.8. Heterogeneous effects on participating school enrollment

Panel A. Effects by individual characteristics



Panel B. Effects by local area deprivation



Note: The figures show DID estimates of the impact of MTP on the probability of enrolling at a participating secondary school. The sample considered is formed by students completing primary education in Camden or bordering school districts. In Panel A, each estimate is obtained by stratifying the sample based on the specified characteristic. Top achievers are students whose standardized test scores are above the 75th percentile. We define "movers" as students whose postcode of residence changed during years 3 to 6 of primary school (25% of our sample). In Panel B, the quartile of local area deprivation is plotted on the horizontal axis. Deprivation is measured by the IDACI index, based on average family income in the LSOA and measured in 2011. All regressions include controls similar to column (4) of Table 3. Standard errors are clustered on schools.

Appendix B Robustness checks

Alternative definition of the treatment. As participation in the program is voluntary, schools can in principle leave and re-enter treatment. Most schools entered treatment by 2015 (1 in 2012, 9 in 2014, 11 in 2015, and 8 in 2016–18). 10 out of 30 primary schools left treatment before the end of the sample period: 2 in 2017, 5 in 2016, 2 in 2015, and 1 in 2014 (see Figure A.5). Moreover, one school exited treatment in 2017 and re-entered in 2018. In our main specification, we keep all entries and exits as the nature of MTP can lead to year-specific effects. However, exiting MTP may happen endogenously as a result of the program's effectiveness. We therefore estimate Equation (1) by assigning to treatment all schools starting from the first year in which an MTP meeting was conducted, and we consider them treated thereafter regardless of whether they exited the program. This yields an "intention-to-treat" estimate of MTP's effect. Table B.1 shows that the results on enrollment outcomes are substantially unchanged.

Table B.1. Intention-to-treat effects of MTP

	Dependent variable: Enrollment indicator at secondary school		
	(1)	(2)	(3)
	Panel A: State schools		
T	-0.059***		
	(0.019)		
MTP	0.035**	0.024**	0.021**
	(0.017)	(0.010)	(0.009)
	Panel B: Participating schools		
T	0.153***		
	(0.036)		
MTP	0.056**	0.018	0.016
	(0.021)	(0.013)	(0.012)
Observations	180,398	180,398	180,398
Year, Census block FE	Y	Y	Y
Primary school FE	N	Y	Y
Individual and primary school characteristics	N	N	Y

Note: The table shows DID estimates of the intention-to-treat impact of MTP on secondary school enrollment. The specifications and table structure follow Table 3. We keep all students in the treatment group once their school enters the program, regardless of early exit from MTP. Standard errors are clustered on schools and reported in parentheses. *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1.

Stacked-by-meeting design. We build a stacked-by-meeting design that averages across DD comparisons involving each of the 85 MTP meetings to investigate enrollment at the few schools (4 on average) that participate in a given meeting. Similar to the stacked-by-event design presented in Section 4, which is stacked by event year, we build a separate

dataset for each MTP meeting (i.e., a school-year combination that is exposed to MTP). In each dataset, we select treated students as year 5 and year 6 students in the school year during which the meeting takes place. We then select our control group as year 5 and year 6 students completing primary education in schools with no meetings but located in the same LAs (i.e., Camden, Islington, Lambeth, Westminster, Brent, Barnet, and Haringey) as the treated students. Finally, we stack all datasets. We define our outcome of interest as an indicator equal to 1 if a student enrolls at one of the schools participating in their meeting. This set of schools varies across meetings and therefore across datasets.

We then estimate the following augmented version of Equation (1):

$$y_{im} = \theta_1 MTP_{s(i),t(i),m} + \sum_{k=-7}^{3} \gamma_k D^k_{t(i),m} + \eta_{s(i)} + \eta_{t(i)} + \eta_{l(i)} + v_{im}, \tag{5}$$

where meetings are indexed by m and $MTP_{s(i),t(i),m}$ is the treatment indicator, equal to 1 if student i's primary school organized meeting m in the year $t(i)$ when student i is enrolled in grade five or six. We include dummies for event time ($D^k_{t(i),m}$, indicating that $t(i)$ occurs k years after meeting m), and school, year and block fixed effects. Vectors of individual and school-level controls are omitted for clarity. Panel A of Table B.2 replicates for consistency the main results for any state school using this alternative approach, while Panel B shows that results for participating schools. The estimates of MTP's impact on enrollment at participating schools presented in Section 5.1 are robust to considering only the schools participating in the single meeting to which a student is exposed.

Table B.2. Stacked-by-meeting design

	Dependent variable: Enrollment indicator at secondary school		
	(1)	(2)	(3)
	Panel A: State schools		
MTP	0.010	0.018*	0.018*
	(0.010)	(0.010)	(0.010)
	Panel B: Participating schools		
MTP	0.009	0.011*	0.011*
	(0.006)	(0.006)	(0.006)
Observations	754,844	749,551	749,551
Event time, Year, Census block FE	Y	Y	Y
Primary school FE	Y	Y	Y
Individual and primary school characteristics	N	Y	Y
Meeting FE	N	N	Y

Note: The table shows DID estimates of MTP's impact on the probability of attending a secondary state school (Panel A) and a participating school (Panel B) using the stacked-by-meeting dataset. Column (1) controls for event time, year, census block (LSOA) and primary school FEs; column (2) adds same vector of controls as in Equation (1); column (3) adds meeting FEs. Standard errors are clustered on schools and reported in parentheses. *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1.

Meetings' content. We investigate whether the treatment effects vary depending on the specific content discussed during the meetings. Using the meeting minutes, we build indicators for meetings with a high performance content. To characterize meeting content, we employ both LDA and an alternative manual allocation (see Appendix D for details). Meeting-level content is computed as simple average of the content of participating schools' meeting minutes. We then augment Equation (1) with an interaction term between the treatment indicator and a dummy variable denoting meetings where the share of words referring to school performance is above the median (column 2 of Table B.3). Estimates show that the increase in enrollment is entirely driven by meetings with relatively high focus on the school environment, while meetings debating performance more intensively do not exhibit differential impacts on enrollment. Importantly, our results are robust to both text analysis methods (LDA and manual allocation are used in Panel A and Panel B, respectively).

Table B.3. Effects of MTP by meeting information content

Dependent variable:	Enrolment at	
	State schools	Participating schools
	(1)	(2)
	Panel A. Latent Dirichlet Allocation (LDA)	
MTP	0.025*	0.025*
	(0.013)	(0.015)
MTP * Performance content above median	-0.002	-0.026
	(0.016)	(0.019)
	Panel B. Manual allocation	
MTP	0.027*	0.017
	(0.014)	(0.017)
MTP * Performance content above median	-0.006	-0.007
	(0.015)	(0.017)
Observations	180,398	180,398
Year, Census block FE	Y	Y
Primary school FE	Y	Y
Individual and primary school characteristics	Y	Y

Note: The table shows DID estimates of the heterogeneous impact of MTP on secondary school enrollment by meeting content. Panel A uses meeting content defined with LDA; Panel B uses meeting content defined with the manual allocation. Dependent variables and controls follow those in Equation (1). We augment it with an interaction term between the MTP treatment indicator and a dummy variable equal to 1 for meetings with high performance content, defined as those where the performance content is above the median. The median is 15% in Panel A, and 26% in Panel B. Standard errors are clustered on schools and reported in parentheses. *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1.

Parental school participation. We estimate heterogeneous effects by parental school participation. We augment Equation (1) with an interaction term between the treatment indicator and an indicator variable equal to 1 if i) the number of parents participating in the meeting is above the median; and ii) the share of parents in relation to cohort size is above the median. Table B.4 shows no statistically significant coefficients for all outcomes considered. This implies that, in line with our assumption, MTP affects parental choice regardless of actual participation in the meetings, most likely due to informational spillovers among parents in the same school grade. Finally, we investigate whether the treatment effect depends on the size of the meetings, and we augment Equation (1) with an interaction term between the treatment indicator and an indicator variable equal to one the number of secondary schools sitting in the panel at the meetings (column 3 of Table B.4).

Table B.4. Effects of MTP by participation in the meetings

Dependent variable:	Enrollment at state schools			Enrollment at participating schools		
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
MTP	0.030***	0.028***	0.037	0.017	0.015	0.023
	(0.011)	(0.011)	(0.037)	(0.013)	(0.013)	(0.035)
MTP * High parental participation	-0.018			-0.009		
	(0.011)			(0.016)		
MTP * High parental participation (share)		-0.010			-0.003	
		(0.014)			(0.016)	
MTP * N. of participating secondaries			-0.003			-0.002
			(0.008)			(0.008)
Observations	180,398	180,398	180,398	180,398	180,398	180,398
Year, Census block FE	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Primary school FE	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Individual and primary school characteristics	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y

Note: The table shows DID estimates of the heterogeneous impact of MTP on secondary school enrollment by participation in the meeting. Dependent variables and controls follow those in Equation (1). Columns (1)-(2), (4)-(5) report estimates obtained from Equation (1) augmented with an interaction term between the MTP treatment indicator and a dummy variable equal to 1 if the number of parents or the share of parents (with respect to cohort size) participating in the meeting are above the median. Column (3) and (6) add the interaction with the number of secondary schools participating in the meeting. Standard errors are clustered on schools and reported in parentheses. *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1.

Appendix C Conceptual Framework

We present a stylized framework to outline how we interpret MTP's effect on school choice. Borrowing from Hastings et al. (2009), we describe school choice as a utility maximization problem. Parent i chooses the secondary school j that maximizes her utility function (U_{ij}) subject to a feasibility constraint. We describe preferences for schools as:

$$U_{ij} = \beta_i^q \, \bar{Q}_{ij} + \bar{X}'_{ij} \, \beta_i^x + \beta_i^e \, \bar{E}_{ij} - C_j + v_{ij}, \tag{C.1}$$

where v_{ij} is an idiosyncratic component. Q_j denotes school academic performance, while X_j is a vector of school characteristics such as peer socio-economic composition and distance from the residence. The index E_j summarizes a bundle of non-test score characteristics we label "school environment", with higher values indicating a better environment. It includes attributes such as the discipline policy enforced in a school, school safety, food quality, or inclusiveness, on which information is hard to find. Finally, private schools charge tuition fees that enter parental utility as a pecuniary cost C_j, with $C_j = 0$ at state schools. Parameters β_i^k represent parent's preference weight for attribute k. Upper bars denote parental beliefs about school attributes.

Parents choose schools based on their beliefs about school attributes (Greaves et al., 2023). For example, a school with environment E_j is evaluated by parent i as $\bar{E}_{ij}$. Depending on the information environment and on parent's own search effort, beliefs about attributes may be more or less accurate. Information interventions such as MTP may shift parental beliefs.[1] In contrast, we find it unlikely for MTP to shift parent's underlying preference for school attributes above and beyond belief updating. However, we acknowledge we cannot distinguish preferences and beliefs in our observational setting, and recent work finds that preferences are malleable to informational interventions (Campos, 2023).

Parents choose the highest-utility school available. Formally, the chosen institution j is such that $U_{ij} > U_{ik}, \forall k \in J_i$, where J_i is the set of schools that parent i can access based on parental demand and admission criteria. The choice set J_i is the combination of state and

[1] Given the organizers' goal, it is reasonable to assume that parents were initially pessimistic about the school environment (E) in state schools. Furthermore, as discussed in Section 2.2, the intervention targeted a quite homogeneous group of high-SES parents, suggesting that beliefs on school environment were, if anything, shifted upward across participants.

private schools accessible to parent i: $J_i = J_i^{state} \cup J_i^{private}$. Even if applying for a place is always possible, parents may not have *de facto* access to some schools. For example, private school require tuition fees, and admission to state schools is prioritized by distance, penalizing parents who cannot afford to reside close to popular schools. We assume that each parent considers the full set of schools available to them, and that J_i is fixed at the time of the intervention.

In this setting, we only observe parental behavior in terms of school enrolment decisions and preferences, and we interpret the effect of MTP as updating parental beliefs on non-test score attributes E_j. Parents learn about the environment at local state-secondary schools through interactions with peers attending these institutions. Information on academic performance and other measurable attributes, instead, is already public and salient, and parents, especially those who are relatively advantaged and targeted by MTP, are already aware of their distributions across local schools.[2] In addition, information on school performance or composition is not the focus of the meetings (see Section 3). In principle, it is possible that parents extract from the meetings information on other school dimensions. However, we show in Appendix B that the effects we estimate are entirely driven by meetings where the main focus of the discussion is on the school environment. While data on parental beliefs are unavailable, we show in Section 5.3 that MTP does not affect parental demand for school academic performance, school type or distance to school. Evidence suggests, therefore, that school choice impacts of MTP described in Section 5.1 are indeed driven by belief updating on other non-test score school attributes.

[2]School Performance tables provide information on school performance (Q_j in Equation C.1), and measures of peer quality (X_j in Equation C.1) including the share of pupils with a special educational need, gender composition, pupils whose first language is not English, and pupils eligible for FSM.

Appendix D Text analysis of MTP meeting minutes

D.1 Content of MTP meetings using Latent Dirichlet Allocation

We characterise the content of MTP meetings using the Latent Dirichlet Allocation (LDA). LDA is a probabilistic model that helps identify word clusters or "topics" within a collection of documents (see e.g., Blei et al., 2003; Schwarz, 2018). LDA uncovers topics from the data based on word co-occurrence patterns. Each topic is characterized by a distribution of words, and each document is represented as a mixture of these topics. The number of topics is pre-defined by the researcher. Since the LDA does not provide topic labels, the researcher needs to interpret the meaning of each topic.

Using LDA to characterize the MTP discussion is appealing in our setting for two key reasons. First, the researcher does not have to allocate each word, in a potentially arbitrary way, to the different categories. This is particularly important for words whose allocation is a priori unclear because it depends on the context (e.g., "students"). In what follows, we essentially work with raw documents, excluding only names and stop-words. The set of decisions taken by the researcher is very limited and, ultimately, restricted to the *ex-ante* definition of the number of topics and the *ex-post* subjective labels. The second reason is that LDA defines topics based on co-occurrences of words, not just word frequencies, capturing the semantic relationships between words.

We obtained minutes of MTP meetings from eight MTP rounds ($2014-2021$), which included transcripts of the discussions made by secondary school panelists. Consistent with our sample, we consider meeting minutes from 2014 to 2018. The minutes are available for a subset of participating secondary schools (13 out of 22): the Archer Academy (AA), Acland Burghley School (ABS), Camden School for Girls (CSG), Fortismere (FORT), Hampstead School, Haverstock, Hornsey School for Girls (HSG), Highgate Wood (HW), Maria Fidelis (MF), Parliament Hill School (PHS), Regent High School (RHS), UCL Academy (UCLA), and William Ellis School (WES). Meeting minutes are organized by secondary school and document the discussions pertaining to each school during the MTP meetings. Therefore, in our LDA framework, a "document" is defined as the meeting minutes gathered for a specific participating secondary school in a given year. We have a total of 43 documents in our dataset. The number of topics in our context is *a priori* unclear. Our

baseline exercise considers 10 topics, however our results are not sensitive to the number of topics chosen (these additional results are available upon request).

Using LDA, we document that MTP meetings overwhelmingly prioritize discussions related to non-test score school attributes. Table D.1 presents the 15 most frequent words for each topic obtained by using LDA.We label topics 8, 9, and 10 as "performance", since they include mainly aspects related to school performance and curriculum. Examples of words included in these topics are: learning, Ofsted, homework, university, ability. These topics make up around 20% of the meetings' discussions (Table D.1, column 2). Conversely, the remaining topics are labeled as "environment", since they include aspects associated with the school environment. Examples of words included in these topics are: dress, social, feminist, feel, bullying, detention, playground, lunchtime, nurturing, happy, feeling, gossip, diversity, welcoming, pastoral. These topics make up 80% of the words spoken during the meetings (Table D.1, column 2).

Two striking facts emergence from this analysis. First, words linked to school performance notably often co-occur with words related to the school environment. For instance, 'academic", which occurs in Topic 4 alongside words such as "dress", "confident", "fair", "feminist", "events". Interestingly, Ofsted reports ("ofsted") are discussed both in the context of school environment (Topic 5) and performance (Topic 9), consistent with them covering a wealth of qualitative and quantitative aspects (see Section 2.1 and footnote 5). This indicates that very often, even when performance is in the discourse, the conversation is intricately linked with factors related to the school environment. Second, while neutral words such as "pupil", "school", and "people" span different topics, they predominantly accompany terms associated with the school environment (e.g. Topic 5). This highlights that when the discussion concerns the student and teacher body the primary focus is on school attributes other than performance.

Table D.1. Most frequent words in topics generated by LDA

Topic	Topic share	Most frequent words	Label
(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
1	0.04	music (0.0152), house (0.0143), languages (0.0139), french (0.0106), heath (0.0101), band (0.0088), forms (0.0078), mandarin (0.0068), walk (0.0059), half (0.0056), express (0.0055), standard (0.0054), playground (0.005), rugby (0.005), dept (0.0045)	Environment
2	0.05	british (0.0077), stopped (0.006), tutoring (0.0057), team (0.0054), mentor (0.0054), pupil (0.005), nurturing (0.0047), exam (0.0047), visited (0.0044), stuff (0.0038), sister (0.0038), jobs (0.0038), friendly (0.0038), library (0.0035), backgrounds (0.0035)	Environment
3	0.05	struggling (0.0079), play (0.0064), relationship (0.0061), brilliant (0.0042), basketball (0.0041), family (0.0038), visit (0.0036), easily (0.0036), football (0.0035), performances (0.0032), japanese (0.003), moving (0.003), roundhouse (0.003), lunchtime (0.0029), heard (0.0029)	Environment
4	0.05	girls (0.0476), academic (0.0211), pupils (0.0196), dress (0.0141), code (0.0114), location (0.0067), daughter (0.0065), confident (0.0057), cuts (0.0054), fair (0.0054), feminist (0.0053), months (0.0048), staff (0.0047), dance (0.0044), events (0.0042)	Environment
5	0.04	ofsted (0.0251), gender (0.0121), dance (0.0107), discipline (0.0087), range (0.0083), child (0.0074), base (0.0073), fewer (0.0068), concern (0.0065), wide (0.0065), diversity (0.0065), disruption (0.0059), progress (0.0059), arts (0.0051), easier (0.0046)	Environment
6	0.50	school (0.1041), teachers (0.0354), people (0.019), lots (0.017), parents (0.017), head (0.0167), students (0.0157), time (0.012), feel (0.0117), system (0.0115), clubs (0.0114), bullying (0.0105), boys (0.0103), behaviour (0.0101), children (0.0098)	Environment
7	0.07	daughter (0.0304), schools (0.0292), looked (0.021), teacher (0.0207), child (0.0181), private (0.0163), local (0.0117), kids (0.0105), impressed (0.0078), friends (0.0073), feeling (0.0065), contact (0.0064), primary (0.0062), happy (0.006), chose (0.0059)	Environment
8	0.08	girls (0.0422), homework (0.032), nice (0.0203), class (0.0176), people (0.0163), boys (0.0133), tutor (0.0132), heath (0.0099), email (0.0094), allowed (0.0094), camden (0.0091), single (0.0086), term (0.0082), dance (0.0076), child (0.0071)	Performance
9	0.06	learning (0.0339), sets (0.0181), ofsted (0.012), report (0.0109), house (0.0094), university (0.0087), engineering (0.0063), trip (0.0061), lecture (0.0058), life (0.0058), level (0.0058), spend (0.0057), mandarin (0.0056), team (0.005), punishment (0.005)	Performance
10	0.06	strong (0.0193), student (0.0161), students (0.0159), english (0.0102), ability (0.0101), stronger (0.0097), form (0.007), class (0.0056), sets (0.005), issue (0.0049), setting (0.0049), challenged (0.0048), poor (0.0046), break (0.0046), people (0.0044)	Performance

Note: The table shows the 15 most frequent words in topics generated by LDA, using meeting minutes from 2014 to 2018. Each document is represented by the minutes relating to a participating secondary school. We have 43 documents. Column (2) presents the average share of words (across documents) that is included in each topic. These shares sum up to 1. Column (3) lists the 10 most frequent words in each topic. For full transparency, we add, in parentheses, the word's share *within* each topic. Column (4) presents the subjective label for each topic. Following Schwarz (2018), we first remove from the text corpus stop-words. We also remove school and personal names, as well as s-genitives. To remove short words, only words with at least 4 characters are considered.

D.2 Content of MTP meetings using a manual allocation

We alternatively characterize the meetings' content by manually assigning words to categories. The aim of this exercise is *not* to replicate the LDA-based allocation manually. In particular, a manual allocation is not feasible for neutral words and, more broadly, for any words that do not easily fit into a specific category. Rather, this exercise is intended to show how the two approaches compare, and whether we would obtain different conclusions with a manual, researcher-driven allocation.

We create a dataset of words starting from the same 43 documents used for LDA using

the following procedure:

i. We extract all words, excluding stop-words (e.g., articles, prepositions, pronouns, conjunctions), from each secondary school's meeting minute documents;

ii. We append all words left after (i) and create a dataset containing all words included in the meeting minutes and the line of the document in which the word was found. In this dataset, each word-line is an observation;

iii. We remove observations referring to the first row of a document, which is used to title each document, and we exclude numbers. This leaves us with $20,793$ word occurrences;

iv. We group the words into two categories: performance ($2,560$ word occurrences) and teachers (916 word occurrences);

v. We remove neutral words ($12,250$ word occurrences) - i.e., words that could not be categorized (more on this below) - and define the "school environment" category as a residual category ($5,067$ word occurrences).

vi. We aggregate the dataset at the word-level and calculate word frequencies.

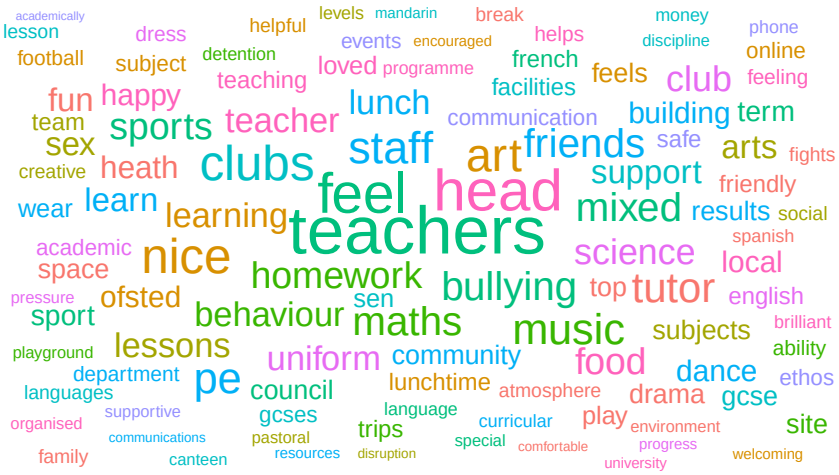
This link ("Word dictionary" tab) provides the full data dictionary with word frequency and categorization. The *performance* category includes words that relate directly to student performance and the school curriculum and are easy to identify. Examples are GCSE, Ofsted, achievement, French, physical education, curriculum. We also include in this category words related to post-secondary student outcomes (e.g., university, job). Adjectives related to languages (e.g. Italian, French) are considered part of the school curriculum. The *teacher* category includes words that directly associated to teachers (e.g., teacher, taught). Neutral words include all those words that could not be categorized, either because they do not have any intrinsic meaning that can be directly mapped into a category (e.g., introducing, type, delayed, main) or because they can potentially relate to several categories (e.g., parent, kids, issues). Finally, we define the residual category as *school environment*, which include all "non-test score" attributes of the school. This category encompasses aspects of the daily school life that do not directly relate to teachers or performance, but are valued

by parents. This includes words that relate to the atmosphere of the school (e.g., happy, friendly, environment, atmosphere), discipline (e.g., misbehaved, supervised, uniformed), extra-activities (e.g., lido, cinema, theatre), facilities (e.g., loos, halls, food, lunch), neighborhood (e.g., local, residential, traffic), inclusive ethos (e.g., sexualities, minority, autism, feminine), and pastoral care (mentoring, nurtured, counsellors, catholic). These school attributes are also the ones that parents value, as evidenced by the survey data presented in Figure 4, Panel B. We note that: i) any word that relates to food provision is allocated to facilities; ii) any word that relates to the dress code is allocated to discipline; iii) any country *name* is assumed to relate to extra-activities (e.g. school trips). We align words with the same root.

The final dataset contains $1,484$ words relate to performance, 585 related to teachers, $7,447$ neutral words, and $2,957$ related to non-test score attributes. This link ("Words in final sample" tab) provides the final list of words, together with their frequency and category. Figure D.1 shows the word cloud with the most mentioned words included in this dataset (excluding the neutral ones).

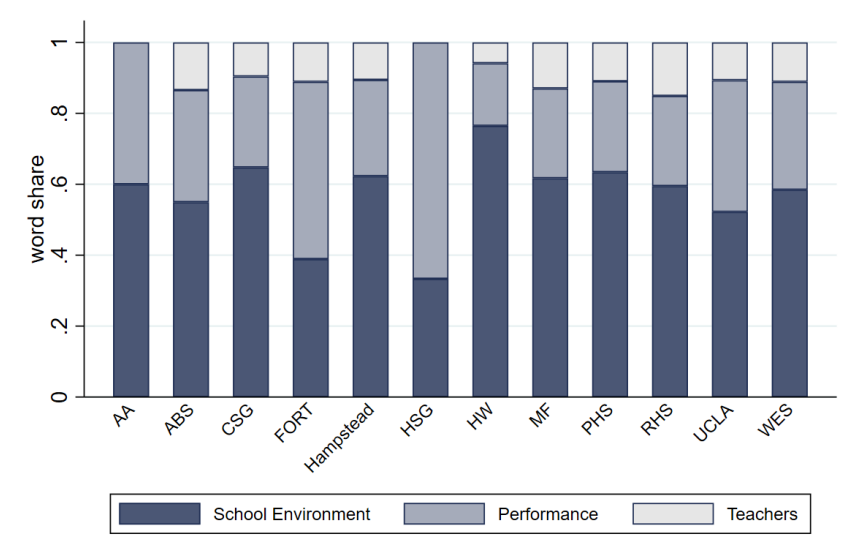
How can we draw a comparison between manual allocation and the results of LDA? Figure D.2 below represents the counterpart of Figure 3, constructed using the manual allocation rather than LDA. Following the manual allocation, around 57% of words used during MTP meetings relate to the school environment at the participating schools. This finding highlights that manually allocating words would *underestimate* the extent to which the school environment is discussed during the meetings. This is because manual allocation doesn't allow us to categorize words whose assignment is context-dependent, or to capture their co-occurrences with other words, while LDA does (see also Section D.1). Despite the differences between the two methods, a remarkable common trait emerges: both methods document that the discussion during the meetings overwhelmingly focuses on the school environment rather than aspects related to performance. Consistent with this observation, Table B.3 – which estimates treatment effects by meeting content – shows that using LDA or the manual allocation leads to similar conclusions.

Figure D.1. Most-mentioned words during MTP meetings



Note: This figure shows the word cloud of words with at least 10 mentions. Table A.1 provides the full school names. The word cloud is generated using the final dataset described in Appendix D.2.

Figure D.2. Content of MTP meetings using the manual allocation



Note: This figure shows the share of word occurrences concerning the school environment relative to performance and teachers by participating secondary school. Table A.1 provides the full school names. See Appendix D.2 for full details on the manual allocation of words.

Appendix E Cost-Benefit Analysis

Estimates of the benefit-cost ratio can be seen in Table E.1. On average, one additional student enrolls in state schools per MTP meeting. To exemplify, considering 2014, the first year in which MTP was scaled up to reach several local primary schools, this would imply 10 additional students opting for the state sector. The $2020-2021$ London average of the per-pupil secondary school funding allocation stands at about £6,913. During the period of our analysis after the pilot phase ($2014-2018$), 85 meetings were organized (see Figure 1). Assuming a constant effect of MTP throughout the period and multiplying £6,913 by 85, we obtain an overall increase in funding available to secondary schools of £587,605.[3]

As far as the increase in school costs is concerned, it is reasonable to assume that, at least in the short term, it is not possible for schools to expand capacity by increasing the number of classes and teaching staff. For our computations, we assume that one additional student i) does not drive an increase in school spending on teaching and general staff and ii) does not drive an increase in school "fixed costs," such as building maintenance. We quantify that "fixed costs" represent about 32% of "running costs," or school expenses, excluding staff.[4] We calculate the share of "fixed costs" over the total "running costs" using aggregate figures for England. Among running costs, we include cleaning and care-taking, water and sewerage, energy, rates, other occupation costs, learning resources (not ICT), ICT learning resources, examination fees, administrative supplies, other insurance premiums, and catering supplies. We exclude building and grounds maintenance and improvement, special facilities, agency supply teaching staff, bought-in professional services—curriculum, bought-in professional services—other, loan interests, community-focused extended school staff, and costs. Under these assumptions, one additional pupil drives an increase of about £1,520 in running costs (£129,200 overall). We obtain the latter figure by multiplying £1,340 by 0.68 (the share of non-fixed running costs) and then

[3]Updated LA and school funding allocations can be found here: https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/school-funding-2021-22-find-constituency-and-school-level-allocations/. The publicly available data can be used to compute the increase in resources that corresponds to different funding allocations. To exemplify, using the average 2021 school funding allocation outside Greater London (about £5,786) would imply an overall increase in resources available of about £491,810.

[4]We follow the categorization of school expenditures provided by the DfE; see, e.g., https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/expenditure-on-education-children-and-young-peoples-services-academic-year-2011-to-2012.

convert the resulting amount in 2021 pounds using the CPI deflator.[5] Finally, secondary schools pay £380 to enter each meeting, and many schools participate in multiple meetings (see Section 2 for details). Over 2014 – 2018, the total number of school/meeting combinations was 367.

Table E.1. Cost-Benefit Analysis

Benefits	
Per-pupil school funding	6,913
One additional student per meeting (N = 85)	587,605
Costs	
School non-fixed running costs	1,520
One additional student per meeting (N = 85)	129,200
Meeting participation fee	380
N = 367 school/meeting combinations	139,460
Net benefits	318,945

Note: The table shows the main figures used for the cost-benefit computation. Details on the different figures are provided in Appendix Section E. Benefits and costs figures are in 2021 pounds.

[5] We use per-pupil estimates obtained here: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/219504/sfr35-2012_001.pdf.