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Elisa Facchetti
Queen Mary University of London

Lorenzo Neri
University of St Andrews

Marco Ovidi
Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore

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Dipartimento di Economia e Finanza
Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore
Largo Gemelli 1 - 20123 Milano – Italy
tel: +39.02.7234.2976 - fax: +39.02.7234.2781
e-mail: dip.economiaefinanza@unicatt.it

Should you Meet The Parents? The impact of information on non-test score attributes on school choice*

Elisa Facchetti*, Lorenzo Neri†, and Marco Ovidi§

*Queen Mary University of London †University of St Andrews §Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore

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Abstract

We study whether parents value non-test score attributes when choosing school. We exploit an intervention designed to provide hard-to-find information about school environment and day-to-day life at local public-sector institutions. School choice in London provides a unique setting where information on academic performance is already diffused and not shifted by the programme we study. Difference-in-differences estimates show the treatment increased enrolment in state-funded schools with respect to private institutions. We uniquely document that the information particularly affected choices of students with high socio-economic status. In addition, the programme has spillover effects on school choice of unexposed parents. Survey data and text analysis of meeting minutes support the interpretation of our results as effects of information on hard-to-find non-test score school attributes. Our results imply that relatively simple interventions may increase state schools' financial resources and the quality of the student intake.

JEL Classification: I24, I28, H75

Keywords: School choice, Non-test score school attributes, Information intervention

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1 Introduction

Past decades have witnessed a rapid and large expansion of school choice policies (Musset, 2012).[1] School choice is typically viewed as a 'market-based' approach that, by aligning school incentives with parental preferences, can raise school quality and ultimately student achievement through competition (Hoxby, 2003). However, a growing literature suggests that parental preferences are not systematically related to schools' causal impact on test scores (see MacLeod and Urquiola, 2019, for a review), questioning what attributes parents value the most in their choices.

The question on the extent to which observed choices reflect parental preferences rather than available information remains open. Information and marketing interventions in education settings have been shown to shift individual choices (Lavecchia et al., 2016) and have important effects on equilibrium levels of school quality (Andrabi et al., 2017). However, existing studies focus on information about school value-added or absolute performance (Hastings and Weinstein, 2008; Hastings et al., 2016; Allende et al., 2019; Ainsworth et al., 2020). Despite the relevance of non-test score dimensions of school quality for students' long-term outcomes (Jackson, 2018; Beuermann and Jackson, 2020; Beuermann et al., 2019), to the best of our knowledge, no study investigates the provision of information on attributes other than school performance indicators based on academic achievement.

We study whether parents react to the provision of hard-to-find information on non-test score school attributes by changing their enrolment choices. We exploit an intervention targeting perspective secondary school parents and students in a context where information on school academic quality is already widespread. The programme, called "Meet The Parents" (hereafter, MTP), involves the organisation of primary-school-level meetings between primary and secondary school parents and students. Kicked off in 2012 in the London Borough of Camden, its main goal was to address the outflow of local students to the private education sector. School choice within the public sector is well-established in England, where School Performance Tables informing parents on standardised test scores and value-added indicators for each state-funded institution are published every year. Discussion at MTP meetings involves school attributes concerning the day-to-day school life, such as school values and environment,

[1] Examples of school choice 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 enrolment' programmes, whereby households can apply to any state school and are assigned based on preference. Introduced in the 1980's open enrolment in England allow parents rank up to 6 preferred schools at application.

discipline policy, safety, and inclusiveness.

We analyse 88 MTP meetings organised from 2012 to 2018, involving 29 different primary schools mostly located in the London borough of Camden. We link data on MTP meetings to individual-level administrative records on the universe of pupils in state-funded education. Participating primary schools stand out in terms of student academic achievement and socio-economic composition, consistently with the aim of targeting parents likely to consider private education. Local secondary schools presented at the meetings tend instead to be underperforming compared to other state-funded schools in the same market.

We evaluate the impacts of MTP through a difference-in-differences design. Our research design compares changes in secondary enrolment outcomes between students in primary schools where an MTP meeting is organised (treatment) and those enrolled in schools that do not participate to MTP (control) before and after the start of the initiative. The control group consists of peers enrolled in unexposed schools in Camden or bordering districts, who arguably face the same secondary school market. As admission depends on distance to school, we further exploit granular data on children location to control for the local area of residence. The identifying assumption is that, absent MTP, changes in school choice behaviour of students residing in the same area would have been similar in treated and control schools. We show that enrolment outcomes of treated and control students follow a similar trend up to MTP start.

We find that MTP increases the probability of enrolling at a state-funded rather than private secondary school. We estimate a 2.4 percentage points effect (2.8%), corresponding to 1 more student per school-year opting for the public sector and to a 24% reduction of the outflow to private education. Among state-funded schools, parents select institutions with similar attributes to those that can be found in private schools – i.e., those with high academic performance, offering single-sex education, or enjoying relatively high degrees of autonomy. We also find that increased enrolment come from parents residing closer to promoted schools, suggesting they trade-off residential distance with school attributes learnt at the meetings.

Treatment effects are driven by parents with high socio-economic status and high-ability students. This is consistent with the intervention's target and implies a positive effect on peer quality at state-funded schools. Moreover, parents belonging to groups likely less rooted in the local community – ethnic or linguistic minorities, families who recently moved – exhibit larger effects. As they have arguably had less chance to learn about local schools, this result supports the interpretation of MTP as an information treatment.

We also document spatial spillover effects of MTP. We find that untreated parents residing in areas with a larger share of exposed peers are more likely to enrol at schools represented at the meetings.[2] Moreover, by estimating indirect effects of area-level exposure on treated parents, we show that enrolment effects are constrained by peer competition for school seats.

Using survey data and text analysis of meetings' minutes, we interpret MTP effects as evidence that parents respond to hard-to-find information on non-test score school attributes. About 40% of parents reported MTP among the information sources they most rely on for school choice, twice more than School Performance Tables, and about 90% of respondents reported changing their mind after the meeting. Parents reported placing a high value on non-test score attributes, such as school atmosphere or inclusive ethos, which represent the main focus of MTP. Consistently, text analysis reveals that the discussion during MTP meetings overwhelmingly focused on school atmosphere and environment rather than school performance.

Our findings contribute to the literature on the effect of information on school choice, which so far has been focusing on low-SES households and children (Hastings and Weinstein, 2008; Hastings et al., 2015) and on the provision of 'hard' metrics of school performance (Jensen, 2010; Kessel and Olme, 2017; Allende et al., 2019). We focus on a policy that target medium- to high-SES households and a context where information on school performance is widely diffused, and show that parents value hard-to-find information on non-test score school attributes over and beyond school performance.

Related studies investigate parental preference for schools. Parents respond to different school attributes, such as peer quality, socio-economic composition, proximity to residence, and student long-term outcomes (Hastings et al., 2010; Burgess et al., 2015; Glazerman and Dotter, 2017; Beuermann et al., 2019; Beuermann and Jackson, 2020; Abdulkadiroglu et al., 2020). Our results suggest that parents also value additional non-test score dimensions, such as school values, environment and welcoming atmosphere. Our results highlight that parental choices - on which the effectiveness of school choice policies hinges - are not necessarily well-informed on such dimensions.

Our results have important policy implications, since the outflow of children towards private education may substantially affect state school students and increase educational inequality. State school funding is largely based on enrolment count, implying that any outflow from the state sector drives a decrease in school resources. This can have detrimental effects on students

[2] This result is in line with large spillovers of information on children attendance and effort on control students within the classroom Bettinger et al. (2021)

remaining in the public sector, especially those from disadvantaged contexts (Jackson et al., 2016; Gibbons et al., 2017). We estimate a net increase in financial resources of £318,945 for the public school sector over the 5 years of the program. Composition of the student body may affect educational outcomes over and beyond a resource effect (through, e.g., peer effects, increased teacher effort, parental participation, or schools' ability to raise additional resources), and this effect is empirically sizeable (Altonji et al., 2015). As students opting for private education are likely to have more advantaged backgrounds, MTP may benefit less-privileged students by increasing peer quality in the public sector. Overall, our findings imply that simple and relatively cheap interventions targeting prospective parents may weaken concerns about adverse effects of school choice on educational stratification and inequality (Hsieh and Urquiola, 2006; Laverde, 2020).

2 Background and data

2.1 The Education System and School Choice in London

State primary education in England is organised in two phases, Key Stage 1 (KS1) and Key Stage 2 (KS2). In the final year of KS2 (age 11) students sit national standardized tests (SATs) in math and English. Secondary school lasts five years, at the end of which students sit the General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSEs) exams, concluding compulsory education.

About 90% of primary school-age children are enrolled in state tuition-free schools (DfE, 2016). The majority of students in the public sector attend 'community' schools, fully controlled and funded by the school districts (local authorities, hereafter, LAs).[3] Other most common state-funded institutions are faith schools, which enjoy some degree of autonomy from the LA (e.g., on admission criteria). Finally, foundation schools and academies enjoy the greatest degree of independence from the LA. The latter, similar to US charter schools, are not bound by the National Curriculum and have considerable autonomy in management.

Every year, the Department for Education (DfE) publishes School Performance Tables to report the exam results of children in primary and secondary schools. These include information on standardised test scores and value-added measures for each state-funded school and are used to form school rankings. Student performance in the test, however, cannot be used by

[3]LAs provide public services in the local area such as education, policing, and social care. London includes 33 LAs.

state secondary schools as an admission criterion.[4] Admission to both primary and secondary state schools is largely based on home-school distance.[5] Primary schools are small, enrolling on average 55 students per cohort, and seats are typically rationed. This implies very narrow catchment areas, with an average of less than 1 kilometre home-school distance in London. Secondary schools, on the other hand, are three times bigger - the average grade enrolment is 165 - and enrol students located 1.4 kilometre from school on average.

Private, often called 'independent' schools, are not bound by the national curriculum. They are generally organised in three phases: pre-preparatory (age 4 to 7), preparatory (age 8 to 11 or 13), and senior (age 11 or 13 to 18). Independent schools enjoy substantial freedom in terms of the subjects they teach and other educational practices. They typically feature smaller class size, high-quality facilities, and above-average academic performance (e.g. Independent Schools Council, 2019). Importantly, as private schools do not participate in the public centralised assignment mechanism, they do not admit students based on distance to school but may select them based on ability or other criteria.

2.2 The Meet The Parents Project

MTP was launched in 2012 by a group of parents concerned about the transition from primary to secondary school for the local community. In the London borough of Camden, the area where the project started, a substantial share of parents enrol 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 while around 25% enrolled in state schools in other districts (the corresponding figures for London are 9% and 17%, respectively).[6]

A stated concern that spurred the MTP initiative was that the outflow of students, typically involving children from more advantaged socio-economic backgrounds, could potentially have negative effects on local secondary schools, students, and communities. First, as school funding is mainly based on enrolment counts, it weakens financial stability and expenditure at state-funded schools. Lack of resources may especially harm disadvantaged students (Jackson

[4] Grammar schools, the only exception to this rule, are virtually absent in our context. Other schools may prioritise applicants based on other criteria (e.g. faith schools typically admit based on religion).

[5] At the end of primary school, parents can express their preferences for up to 6 schools. In London, about 70% of parents obtain the first-choice secondary school and about 90% obtain one of their top 3 choices.

[6] One potential explanation for the private school enrolment rate is that Camden residents have relatively high income (see public aggregate data).

et al., 2016). Additionally, the outflow of well-supported pupils worsens the socio-economic composition of local secondary schools. As a result, the efficiency of school allocation may worsen with non-linear peer effects, i.e., if disadvantaged pupils benefit from proximity with well-supported peers without harming the latter's achievement (Carrell et al., 2009; Bertoni et al., 2020a).

MTP consists of primary-school-level meetings where parents and children from local secondary school talk to primary school peers about their school choice and experience. Events are typically one-hour long and involve a panel discussion and questions, guided by a moderator (see Figures A.1 and A.2). On average, meetings are attended by panellists from 4 different secondary schools. The typical participating secondary school is present at 1 or 2 different meetings per year, with substantial variation (up to 5). Meetings are scheduled at the beginning of the academic year, a few weeks before last-grade parents apply for secondary school. The average event is attended by about 17 primary school parents, mostly with children in the two final grades, forming about 40% of the average cohort size.[7]

Each meeting follows a standardised outline. In the first part, panellists 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. Panellists typically focus on day-to-day school life, the reasons for choosing their school, and the overall assessment of their decision, without mentioning school performance indicators. Events are aimed at providing a honest assessment of local secondary schools from 'insiders' with no advertising intent (school leaders are not invited). In this sense, MTP aims at filling 'a gap between slick open days and playground rumours'.[8]

Overall, MTP purposely focuses on qualitative dimensions of the schooling experience, which are typically more difficult for parents to acquire. Parents are likely already informed on peer quality indicators such as test scores, since School Performance Tables are easily accessible and highly publicised by schools.[9] MTP provides therefore the ideal setting to study the provision of information on non-test score attributes, holding constant the information on school performance.

[7] Data on parental participation are available for 67% of meetings. We impute parental participation in missing years using school-level average at schools with consistent availability of data, increasing coverage to 83% of the events.

[8] See the MTP website for details and further material.

[9] Existing evidence shows that parents strongly respond to peer quality indicators before the start of MTP (see, e.g., Burgess et al., 2015).

2.3 Data and Descriptive Statistics

We exploit the National Pupil Database (NPD), including administrative records on the population of students in primary and secondary state-funded schools from 2006 to 2019. We track residence at the census block level, and individual school enrolment throughout compulsory education.[10] We observe background characteristics (gender, ethnicity, language spoken at home, eligibility for subsidised lunches, and special education needs), teacher assessments at the end of the first phase of primary school (Key Stage 1 scores, age 7), and test scores in math and language from national standardised tests at the end of primary school (Key Stage 2 scores, age 11).[11]

Students attending private schools are not recorded in the NPD. We code a Year 6 student as enrolling into a private institution if not tracked in the dataset one year later. Hence, enrolment at private school is defined as a residual case.[12] Using this proxy, we estimate that every year about 10% of students enrol into a private secondary school on average.[13]

We complement administrative data with records on MTP meetings provided by the organisers. We gathered data on the time, location, secondary schools represented, and number of participants for each event.[14] In 2019, we further administered a survey to participating parents collecting their child's grade, their characteristics (following the same coding as in the NPD), and the type of schools they were considering. We also asked about the sources of information parents use, the school features they value the most, and how MTP changed their choice (see Figures A.3 and A.4). This was added to less detailed surveys administered by the MTP organisers in the years before 2019.

MTP was launched in 2012 and progressively rolled out, as shown in Figure 1. Initially

[10] The census blocks used in our analysis are Lower Layer Super Output Areas (LSOAs). These geographical units were created by the Office for National Statistics (ONS) for census reporting purposes, and contain 800 households on average, which correspond to around 1/3 of the size of a US census block.

[11] In addition, the NPD is matched to administrative data on centralised assignment to school, including the list of preferred institutions for each student and the school offered as a result of the assignment. We use the latter to proxy school capacity and obtain over-subscription indicators. Since preference data are available from 2014 only, and exploiting records on pre-programme periods is crucial in our research design, we consider enrolment rather than school preferences as the main outcome in our analysis.

[12] Other reasons that would justify the disappearance from the dataset could be, e.g., that a student leaves the country or is taken out of school for medical reasons. Note that grade retention would not imply the disappearance from the dataset, as we would observe the student repeating the same school grade one year later. Any measurement error in private school enrolment is unlikely to be affected by MTP and is then controlled for in our difference-in-differences empirical strategy.

[13] This figure is consistent with the official statistics on pupils count, which report that 8% of students attend private secondary schools in England (breakdown by areas is not available).

[14] MTP participants cannot be individually linked to administrative data.

run in one pilot school, the programme was extended to include up to 20 primary schools per year (Panel A). Schools, contacted in advance about hosting an MTP event, potentially enter or exit the initiative each year. The participation decision potentially depends on many variables such as the interest of parents or school leaders about secondary school choice.[15] However, there are no monetary incentives for primary schools to select into MTP based on its impact on local secondary enrolment.[16] We deal with potential systematic differences between treated and control schools in our research design, as detailed in Section 4.

The initiative is concentrated in the borough of Camden. As shown in Figure A.7, most participating primary schools are in Camden, adding up to about 50% of primary institutions in the LA.[17] Half of the 24 promoted secondary schools are in Camden, corresponding to 80% of the local secondary schools (16 out 20). Other participating secondary schools are located in bordering LAs, consistently with the larger size of their catchment areas.

Panel A of Table 1 shows descriptive statistics for primary schools in our treatment (column 1) and control (columns 2 and 3) groups. Primary schools organising MTP events enrol students from relatively advantaged backgrounds. With respect to other schools in Camden, participating schools serve students that are less likely to be eligible for subsidised lunch (34% versus 47%).The difference is even more striking when considering white origin and whether English is the native language (51% and 60% versus 33% and 43%, respectively). Students in participating primary schools also have substantially better achievement compared to peers in Camden, scoring well above the London average in mathematics and English at KS2. Finally, primary schools organising MTP events are in higher demand by parents as the average distance to school is lower and enrolment count higher than other local institutions.

On the other hand, secondary schools participating at the meetings display lower academic performance than other institutions in the area. Final year test scores in mathematics and English are 0.12 and 0.08 standard deviations (hereafter, σ) lower than non-participating schools, as can be seen in Panel B of Table 1. They also serve a more disadvantaged intake, with a 6 percentage points higher share of students eligible for free lunch. Overall, descriptive statistics are in line with the concerns of dissipating the investment in excellent primary schools that

[15] Participation to MTP does not pose substantial costs on primary schools, as it essentially involves reserving a room for the meeting and spreading the word among parents.

[16] Still, 10 out of 29 participating schools exit the initiative at some point in time (see Figure A.6). To alleviate concerns about selective exit, in Appendix B we show that Intention-to-Treat estimates are substantially unchanged.

[17] Not far from the border with Camden, two participating schools are located in the borough of Islington, and three in the borough of Haringey.

sparked the MTP initiative.

3 Interpreting the Effect of MTP on School Choice

We present here a stylised framework to outline how we interpret the effect of MTP on school choice. Several studies conclude that parents respond to peer quality indicators such as test scores (Hastings and Weinstein, 2008; Burgess et al., 2015; Abdulkadiroglu et al., 2020; Ainsworth et al., 2020). Non-test score school attributes may also play a role. For instance, Burgess et al. (2009) show that a "general good impression" of the school is the most frequently cited reason for choosing schools beside geographical proximity. Consistent with this view, Beuermann et al. (2019) and Beuermann and Jackson (2020) find that parents value school effectiveness on an array of long-run socio-economic outcomes, often uncorrelated with school impact on test scores. To assess such impacts, parents may look beyond measurable school characteristics.

Borrowing from Hastings et al. (2010), we describe school choice as a utility maximisation problem. Parent i chooses the secondary school j that maximises her utility function (U_{ij}) subject to a feasibility constraint. We describe preferences for schools as:

$$U_{ij} = \beta_i^q \, Q_j + X_j' \, \beta_i^x + \beta_i^e \, E_j - C_{g(j)} + v_{ij}, \tag{1}$$

where v_{ij} is an idiosyncratic component. Measurable attributes are Q_j, denoting school academic performance, and X_j, summarising other characteristics such as peer socio-economic composition and distance from residence. The index E_j summarises a bundle of non-test score characteristics we label "school environment", on which information are hard to find. This includes attributes such as the discipline policy enforced in a school, school safety, food quality, or school atmosphere. Finally, private schools charge tuition fees that enter parental utility as a pecuniary cost, $C_{g(j)}$, where $g(j)$ indicates schools j's state or private sector and $C = 0$ at state-funded schools.

Parents enrol their children at the highest-utility school that is 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-funded and 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 because of admission criteria or other entry barriers. For example, tuition fees must be paid to enrol in private institutions, and admission to state schools is prioritised by distance, penalising parents who cannot afford residence 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. MTP meetings, indeed, are organised close to the application deadline, when residential choice is likely fixed.

Following Hastings et al. (2010), we interpret β's in equation (1) as the weights parents assign to each school attribute. These may reflect either genuine parental preference or the stock of available information on a particular trait. Intuitively, parents will not be able to properly account for a certain attribute when choosing a school if they have very limited information about it, regardless of their taste. Therefore, weak preference and lack of information for a school trait are observationally equivalent when analysing school choice. To visualise this distinction, for a generic school attribute a, parental weight can be written as:

$$\beta_i^a = \delta_i^a * \tau_i^a, \tag{2}$$

where δ_i^a reflects parent i's taste for attribute a, while τ_i^a represents the extent to which the parent is informed on a.

In this setting, we interpret the effect of MTP as providing hard-to-find information on non-test score attributes, represented by E_j in equation (1). The intervention enables parents to learn about the environment at local state secondary schools through interactions with peers attending such institutions. Information on academic performance and other measurable attributes, instead, are already public and salient and parents, especially the relatively advantaged families targeted by MTP, are likely already aware of their distributions across local schools.[18] In addition, information on school performance or composition are never discussed at the meetings. At the same time, MTP cannot shift preferences over other important attributes such as distance

[18] School Performance Tables provide information on school performance (Q_j in Equation 1), and a number of intake characteristics as a share of the total roll: pupils with a special educational need, gender, pupils whose first language is not English, pupils eligible for subsidised lunches (X_j in Equation 1).

to school. Therefore, we view its effect as working through increased information on school environment, holding other attributes valued by parents constant.

In conclusion, the potential impact of MTP on school choice would suggest that parents value non-test score school attributes, as they react when provided such information. Parental utility described by Equation (1) can significantly change as a result of the intervention only if parents also have a genuine preference for E_j. Otherwise, the information shock provided by MTP would hardly shift parental utility enough to change their school choice.

4 Empirical Strategy

In this section, we present our empirical strategy, guided by the conceptual framework discussed in Section 3. Our goal is to estimate the causal treatment effect of MTP on parental enrolment choices. This raises important identification challenges as one needs to estimate a counterfactual which describes how the outcome would have changed absent the treatment. For this purpose, we design a difference-in-differences (DD) strategy that exploits variation in participation to MTP meetings across schools and over time.

Our control group is formed by all students attending a primary school that never participated to MTP, and that is located in Camden or one of the bordering LAs. This choice is motivated by the fact that control schools operate in the same local market as treated schools.[19] Despite displaying some differences in characteristics such as test scores and student composition (see Table 1), control schools are likely to be exposed to similar changes in the local education system, and, therefore, to have similar trends in terms of enrolment outcomes. This selection yields 224,637 control students, either completing primary education before MTP started or enrolled in one of the 328 control schools (Table A.1).[20]

To internalise plausible spillovers, we define all students in a school-cohort with an MTP meeting as treated.[21] This choice is backed by survey evidence, as virtually all participating parents (97%) 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.[22]This

[19]93% of students enrolling in MTP-promoted secondary schools attended primary school in Camden or bordering LAs.

[20]We test the robustness of our choice by considering alternative control groups as detailed in Appendix B.

[21]We consider as exposed students in grades 5 and 6. As MTP meetings are mainly addressed to students in final grades, these account for about 90% of the participants (Figure 3).

[22]Conducting an informational experiment on student behaviour, Bettinger et al. (2021) find large spillovers within classrooms, similar to treatment effects for directly-exposed students. We would expect similar spillovers

criterion yields 3,990 students in our treatment group (Table A.1).

We estimate a two-way fixed effects model (TWFE):

$$Y_{islt} = \alpha_0 + \alpha_1 MTP_{st} + X'_{islt}\gamma + W'_{st}\delta + \phi_s + \phi_l + \phi_t + e_{islt} \tag{3}$$

where Y_{islt} is the outcome for pupil i enrolled in the last grades of primary school s in year t, and residing in local area l. [23] Our main outcomes of interest are sector and characteristics of the secondary school where a student enrols. MTP_{st} is the treatment indicator, equal to 1 for schools organising an MTP meeting in year t. X_{islt} and W_{st} are, respectively, vectors of individual and school time-varying controls. The inclusion of school and year fixed effects, respectively ϕ_s and ϕ_t, isolates DD variation in our treatment variable. In particular, ϕ_s controls for any unobserved attribute at the school level that may affect enrolment, such as correlated choices among schoolmates or the presence of a particularly motivated head-teacher in engaging with parental choice. We additionally include local area fixed effects (ϕ_l), controlling for unobserved effects of student residence on school enrolment. This is important in our context as residential sorting impacts the choice set of available state-funded schools. We cluster standard errors at the school level to account for correlation in the treatment status.

α_1 in equation (3) identifies the effect of MTP on school enrolment under the assumption that, absent MTP, treated and control students would have followed similar trends in secondary enrolment decisions. Figure A.5 plots trends of our main enrolment outcomes separately for treatment and control group, showing that they are roughly parallel up to the introduction of MTP. As expected, treated students are systematically more likely to choose a private secondary institution. Despite enrolment outcomes being hardly comparable in levels, we view parallel trends assumption as plausible since treated and control students face the same secondary school market.

A recent econometric literature highlighted several issues with TWFE estimators under variation in treatment timing and heterogeneous treatment effects (Borusyak and Jaravel, 2021; Goodman-Bacon, 2021; De Chaisemartin and d'Haultfoeuille, 2020; Callaway and Sant'Anna, 2021; Sun and Abraham, 2021; Baker et al., 2021). In our context, possibly different schools enter treatment in different years, and we cannot rule out some degree of treatment effect het-

as the typical primary school cohort has just one or two classes.

[23] The local areas considered are Lower Layer Super Output Areas (LSOAs), narrowly defined areas spanning about 0.25 square miles and including about 800 households on average.

erogeneity. To assess the sensibility of our estimates, we additionally offer results from a "stacked-by-event" design which pools all possible 2-by-2 DD comparisons in our data and does not suffer from the pitfalls associated with TWFE estimation. We build 'placebo' events for control schools similar to Deshpande and Li (2019). First, we create a separate dataset for each treatment wave.[24] Each dataset includes all students in treated schools that entered MTP in the considered wave, along with never-treated students. Second, we define relative time to event in each dataset with respect to the year where treatment starts in the considered wave. Third, we stack all datasets into one. In this procedure, one student in never-treated schools serves as control at different event times depending on the treatment wave considered. We follow Deshpande and Li (2019), Cengiz et al. (2019) and Fadlon and Nielsen (2019) and estimate:

$$y_{islt} = \sum_{k=-9}^{3} \gamma_k \cdot \mathbb{1}(t=k) + \sum_{k=-9}^{3} \beta_k MTP_s \cdot \mathbb{1}(t=k) + X'_{islt}\gamma_1 + W'_{slt}\delta_1 + \phi_s + \phi_l + \phi_t + e_{islt} \quad (4)$$

where the notation follows the one of equation (3). $\mathbb{1}(t=k)$ are event-time dummies, equal to 1 if year t is k years from entry into the MTP programme. This procedure allows us to separately identify year and event-time fixed effects, eliminating event time trends that do not appear in calendar time.

The leads in equation (4) can be interpreted as placebo estimates of the MTP effect, indirectly testing the parallel trends assumption in a regression framework. Figure 4 plots the point estimates of β_k before and after the treatment. Estimates of pre-treatment coefficients are close to zero, and statistically not significant for all main outcomes, supporting our identifying assumption. This finding is consistent with the observation that MTP started as a grassroots movement that could hardly be anticipated by parents at the time of enrolment into primary school. We discuss how treatment effects obtained using the TWFE specification in (3) compare to the effects obtained using the "stacked-by-event" specification in (4) in Section 5 below.

5 Results

[24] We build four datasets, corresponding to the four treatment waves (see Appendix Figure A.6), excluding the first pilot primary school which started MTP in 2012.

5.1 Choice of school sector and location

Exposure to MTP increases enrolment at state-funded rather than private secondary school. Panel A of Table 2 reports estimates of α_1 in equation (3), where the outcome is an indicator of enrolment at a state-funded secondary school. The raw correlation between MTP exposure and public-sector enrolment is close to zero and not statistically significant (column 1). We progressively include local area and school fixed effects in columns (2) and (3) to isolate the effect attributable to the programme. Parents exposed to MTP are 2.4 percentage points (pp, corresponding to 2.8%) more likely to enrol their pupils into state-funded schools, corresponding to 1 additional student enrolling into state-funded schools per each MTP meeting.[25] Estimates are barely affected when including controls for individual and primary school characteristics (column 4). As covariates provide precision gains, we discuss the latter as our preferred specification in what follows.

We next consider specific sub-group of schools within the public sector. In Panel B, we focus on enrolment at secondary state-funded schools promoted during MTP meetings.[26] Exposure to MTP increases the probability of enrolling to a secondary school represented at the meetings by 1.4 pp, though the estimate is not statistically different from zero. Panels C and D show that increased public-sector enrolment is homogeneously spread across schools in Camden and neighbouring districts (estimates are, however, statistically insignificant). As expected, the sum of the two coefficients corresponds to the overall estimate in Panel A, suggesting that the program has null impact outside the districts we consider.

Post-treatment coefficients plotted in Figure 4 show how the effect of MTP evolves after a school enters the programme. Reported estimates are obtained from the stacked-by-event design in equation (4). Impacts on public-sector enrolment in Panel A are positive and significant up to three years after the beginning of the treatment, and are overall consistent with average TWFE estimates in Panel A of Table 2. Similarly, Panels B-D in Figure 4 are consistent with corresponding average estimates in Table 2.[27] These results suggest that TWFE estimates provide similar findings than what would be obtained by an alternative design robust to treatment effect heterogeneity. We present results from the former specification in what follows.

In conclusion, results show that MTP meetings increase enrolment at local state-funded

[25] This figure is obtained by applying the estimated coefficient to the average cohort size in last grade of treated schools (about 40 students).

[26] We consider here any secondary school participating to at least one MTP meeting over our sample period.

[27] The time dynamics of estimated effects might either reflect heterogeneous impacts across periods or a compositional effect, as we do not observe all participating schools for five consecutive periods.

schools.[28] Our findings are not negligible in magnitude, as they imply a 24% reduction of the primary-school student outflow to private education. Inflow of pupils in the public sector, however, is not necessarily directed towards local institutions discussed at the meetings. Though 4 to 5 secondary schools are represented at a typical meeting, the institution where a pupil enrols is obviously just one. Larger impacts on enrolment are expected at schools with attributes associated to parental demand, as we show in the next subsection.

5.2 Choice among state-funded schools

In this subsection, we dig deeper into the effect of MTP on school choice by considering quality, composition, type, and distance from residence of state-funded secondary schools.

School attributes

MTP increases enrolment at top-performing state-funded institutions, while leaving enrolment at low-performing schools largely unaffected. We present estimates similar to column (4) of Table 2 where the outcome considered is an indicator of school quality. In columns (1)-(2) of Table 3, we consider final-year test scores and investigate enrolment at schools in the top or bottom quartile of academic performance.[29] Parents exposed to MTP are about 5 pp more likely to enrol at a state-funded school with high academic performance (Panel A), doubling the average result in column (4) of Table 2. Result are similar for MTP-promoted schools (Panel B), suggesting the meetings induce parents to enrol at higher-performing schools among the one presented. Consistently, panels C and D show that the result is entirely driven by local schools, likely reflecting access barriers to high-demanded institutions located further away (see Panel C and D, column 1).[30]

The second index of school quality we consider is popularity, measured by oversubscription. We consider a school oversubscribed if available seats are outnumbered by applicants ranking it as first choice (37% of secondary schools in London).[31] In line with effects by

[28] We show in the Appendix that our results survive a series of robustness checks addressing several potential concerns with our estimates.

[29] We use Year 11 test scores (GCSEs) in mathematics, standardised to have zero mean and unit variance by year. We measure school academic performance at the time students enter secondary education.

[30] Top-performing schools are more likely to be oversubscribed as parents in England are found to reward them with higher demand (Burgess et al., 2015; Burgess et al., 2019).

[31] This is a lower bound of over-subscription as applicants excluded from higher-preference schools are in the list for admission as well. We proxy school-year capacity with the number of offers issued. The over-subscription indicator is computed at 2014, the first year where preference data are available.

school performance, results in columns (3) and (4) of Table 3 show that MTP increases enrolment to popular local state-funded schools, including those represented at the meetings, but not elsewhere, likely due to rationing of school seats.

These results imply that our estimates may be a lower bound of the MTP impact on school enrolment as access to oversubscribed schools is rationed. To investigate this hypothesis, we estimate the effect of MTP on preferences submitted at application, a direct measure of parental demand.[32] Although results in Table A.2 should be interpreted with caution, they show increased parental willingness to consider state-funded school.[33] While we find no effect of MTP on parental rankings (columns 1-4), this could simply reflect parents requesting state school seats regardless of their preference for private education as application is free of charge. On the other hand, parents exposed to MTP are about 3 pp less likely to enrol at a private institution upon receiving an offer for an MTP-promoted or any state-funded school (columns 5-7). Results suggest that MTP increases take up of the offered public-sector school with respect to opting out to private education.

We next focus on school type and socio-economic composition. In this analysis, we abstract from geographical location of state-funded schools. First, we look at the effect of MTP by type of state-funded school (Table 4). The effect of MTP is concentrated on state-funded schools other than academies, increasing enrolment at community and voluntary aided schools by 5.2 and 7.1 pp, respectively (columns 1-2).[34] As faith, and particularly Catholic, schools are often among top-performing state-funded institutions (Pasini, 2019), the result is consistent with parents favouring high-performing schools (see Table 3). However, since community schools are on average lower-performing, results suggest that school attributes learnt during meetings are not necessarily correlated with absolute achievement.[35] In addition, MTP has a substantial positive impact on enrolment at single-sex schools (6 pp, column 4). Second, we look at student characteristics of the secondary schools where pupils enrol (Table 5).[36] MTP decreases the

[32] The mechanism employed for centralised assignment in London incentivises parents to rank schools in the true order of preference, although preference about non-ranked institutions cannot be inferred from observed rankings (Fack et al., 2019).

[33] Since preference data are only available from 2014, in Table A.2 we focus on schools entering the programme from 2015, together with the control group, so that at least one pre-period is available.

[34] Community schools are the most frequent secondary school type in Camden or bordering districts (38%), followed by academies and voluntary aided (mostly religious) schools (28% and 26%, respectively). Foundation schools, for which we also find a positive effect, represent just the 7.5% of institutions. As academies have experienced a steep expansion during the period we consider, mainly through conversion of community schools, we define school type at the time a student enters secondary education.

[35] In our sample, community schools perform slightly below the London average, while the other three types of school (religious, academies and foundation) similarly perform about 0.5σ above the mean.

[36] We measure school composition in 2009, before the first cohort exposed to MTP begins the final year of KS2

share of students with special needs and white students by about 1 pp on average (columns 1 and 3, respectively).[37]

Overall, our findings suggest that MTP increases enrolment at state-funded schools with specific attributes. Exposed students enrol at high-quality institutions, consistently with robust evidence in the literature (Hastings et al., 2010; Burgess et al., 2015; Glazerman and Dotter, 2017; Abdulkadiroglu et al., 2020), and at single-sex schools, two typical characteristics of private education. However, we also find that exposure to MTP shifts parents towards ethnically mixed and community schools, implying that what parents look for in a school is not simply summarised in academic performance measures. Results suggest that the impact of similar initiatives could possibly be even larger if state-funded schools invested in developing attributes associated with parental demand.

Distance to school

Distance to school is a crucial variable in parental choice, especially in our context. Proximity to residence is highly-valued by parents, so much that the literature often measures parental preferences in terms of willingness to travel (see, e.g., Bertoni et al., 2020b). In addition, distance to school determines access to state-funded schools, allowing us to investigate the impact of school feasibility.

We find that MTP significantly increases enrolment at promoted schools for parents located closest to their premises. We build a student-school level dataset by stacking distance of a given pupils to each of the 22 MTP-promoted schools. Figure 6 plots estimated coefficients from specifications similar to equation (3) where treatment is interacted with a series of indicators for 500-meter-wide bands of distance to school. Estimates are plotted along with the 95% confidence interval at the central distance value of each band. Parents exposed to MTP are 4 pp more likely to enrol at a promoted school with respect to control parents residing within 500 meters (Panel A). This estimate is substantially larger than the average result in Table 2, and statistically significant. The effect fades out rapidly with distance, dropping to zero beyond 1 km from the school.

Parents are willing to accept longer travel to school to enrol their children at popular pro-

to hold constant time-varying school characteristics. Results do not change if we instead use contemporaneous outcomes.

[37] We also find negative effects on the share of students entitled to subsidised lunch or speaking English at home (columns 2 and 4), although estimates are not statistically significant.

moted institutions. Panel B of Figure 6 focuses on oversubscribed promoted schools (5 out of 22, which explains the drop in precision). These effects are likely constrained by feasibility, as seats are rationed and parents located too far from the school hardly get access.[38] Estimates for closest students are very similar to those in Panel A suggesting that, at relatively short distance to school ($\leq$ 1km), MTP impact does not depend on over-subscription. Nonetheless, the effect on oversubscribed promoted schools persists at farther distances, dropping to zero only after 2.5 km, suggesting higher willingness to travel.

Overall, results suggest parents face a trade-off between proximity and other school attributes they value. When an MTP-promoted schools is available at a short distance, we observe an increase in enrolment regardless over-subscription. Interestingly, the fact that parents located in the vicinity of a school – likely the best informed on its attributes – exhibit largest impacts supports our view that information provided by MTP is hard to find elsewhere.

5.3 Heterogeneous effects

The impact of MTP is concentrated on relatively affluent students. Columns (1) and (2) of Table 6 show that students not eligible for subsidised lunch are 3.6 pp more likely to enter any state-funded school (Panel A), mostly local (Panel C), and about 3 pp more likely to choose a represented secondary school (Panel B). As a further proxy of parental socio-economic status, we estimate MTP effects by local area (LSOA) deprivation, using an index based on average income in the neighbourhood. Figure 5 shows that exposed parents in the lowest deprivation quartile are almost 6 pp more likely to enrol their children at a public-sector school (Panel A) or a promoted secondary school (Panel B). Results for students residing in higher-deprivation areas are smaller and not statistically significant. Consistently, MTP impacts school choice of the highest-performing students. Columns 3 and 4 of Table 6 report estimates by mathematics test scores at the end of primary school. While we detect no effects for students in the bottom quartile, top-performing peers exhibit positive and large effects on enrolment to local state-funded school, especially those promoted at the meetings.

Finally, MTP effects are larger than average for students likely less rooted in the local education system. MTP increases enrolment of Asian students at any state-funded school and at promoted schools by 3.2 and 4.9 pp, respectively (columns 5-6). Larger effects of state-funded

[38] Priority over distance is often granted to special categories of applicants such as siblings of current students, students from feeder primary schools, or religious students in case of faith schools.

vis-à-vis private school enrolment are also estimated on students who are not native speakers (columns 7-8) and who have recently moved their residence (columns 9-10).[39] These findings are consistent with the interpretation of MTP as an information treatment, as discussed more in details in Section 6.

Overall, the effect of MTP is highly heterogeneous based on students socio-economic background. The differential effects we find are consistent with the programme's target, composed of relatively advantaged student. We conclude that MTP has not only a quantitative effect on public-sector enrolment, but also a compositional one, increasing peer quality at local state-funded institutions.

5.4 Spillovers

In this section, we investigate spillover effects of MTP by exploiting variation in the share of treated students across neighbourhoods. Geographical proximity to parents exposed to MTP may affect enrolment outcomes via two different channels. First, it could increase parental interest in local secondary schools through the spread of information about promoted institutions. In light of our results, the information channel would positively impact local public-sector enrolment. Second, if a school falls oversubscribed, proximity to treated parents could result in further rationing of seats. The competition channel would negatively impact local public-sector enrolment.

MTP spillover effects depend on the fraction of exposed parents in a local area. Following Autor et al. (2014), we measure the intensity of exposure to treatment as the share of students directly exposed to MTP in a local area:

$$MTPI_l = \frac{\sum_i MTP_{s(i)} \cdot \mathbb{1}(L_i = l)}{\sum_i \mathbb{1}(L_i = l)},$$

where $s(i)$ is the primary school attended by student i, MTP indicates whether school s organised some meeting, and L_i denotes the census block where i resides in grade 6.

[39] We define movers here as pupils whose postcode of residence has changed during years 3 to 6 of primary school. The 25% of students is defined as mover according to this criterion.

We estimate spillover effects through the following specification:

$$y_{islt} = \tau_0 + \tau_1 MTP_s \cdot T_{st} + \tau_2 MTPI_l \cdot T_{st} + \tau_3 MTP_s \cdot MTPI_l \cdot T_{st} + X'_{islt}\gamma_2 + W'_{st}\delta_2 + \phi_s + \phi_l + \phi_t + \varepsilon_{islt}. \quad (5)$$

In this formulation, τ_1 estimates the direct effect of MTP on exposed parents in hypothetical areas where no other parent is exposed (Autor et al., 2014). The indirect effect of MTP, captured by exposure intensity $MTPI$, is allowed to vary by treatment status: the indirect impacts on exposed and unexposed parents are estimated by τ_2 and τ_3, respectively. To interpret our results, we assume that exposed parents are not affected by the spread of information from exposed neighbours. It follows that τ_3 purely reflects the competition channel of MTP spillover, while τ_2 captures a combination of the competition and information channels.

Competition for seats at local secondary schools plays a significant role. Estimates from equation (5) are presented in Table 7. Consistently with our hypothesis, estimates of τ_3 for MTP-promoted schools are negative and statistically significant, implying that enrolment at schools presented during meetings was constrained by competition from other exposed parents (see column 1, Panel B). A one standard deviation higher intensity in local MTP exposure lowers the chance of being enrolled to an MTP-promoted secondary school by 1 pp Columns (2) and (3) show that competition effect is found only at oversubscribed schools, the sole group of schools where it may display. Moreover, consistently with the fact that a seat in one state-funded school is guaranteed by law, the competition effect on enrolment at any public-sector institution (Panel A, column 1) is a precisely estimated zero.

Competition effects imply that the direct impact of MTP on enrolment at promoted schools is larger than net effects. Estimates of τ_1 in equation (5) is 3.6 pp (Panel B, column 1), larger than the net impact estimated in Panel B of Table 2. On the contrary, the direct impact of MTP on enrolment at any state-funded school is remarkably similar to the net effects (Panel A of Table 7, column 1). Once again, the result is consistent with the absence of competition effect on this outcome.

The spread of information generated by MTP impacted the school choice of unexposed parents living in the proximity of treated peers. Estimates of τ_2 in Panel B are positive on average, and strongly significant for oversubscribed institutions (see columns 1 and 2, respectively). These results could reflect both channels of MTP spillovers, combining information and com-

petition effect. As the latter are found to be negative, estimates of τ_2 can be interpreted as a lower bound for the information effect.[40]

We conclude that MTP meetings have significant spillover effects on untreated parents residing at close contact with exposed peers. Results suggest that parents value their peers' opinion in school choice and resort to word-of-mouth to inform their decision. This conclusion is also in line with survey responses, indicating other parents are one of the mostly-cited sources of information (see Panel A of Figure 2).

6 Discussion and survey evidence

We discuss here potential mechanisms driving the treatment effects unveiled in Section 5, assisted by descriptive evidence from parental surveys administered at MTP meetings.[41] Although we can ultimately offer only suggestive evidence, we argue that our results reflect the impact of providing hard-to-find information on non-test score school attributes (see Section 3).

MTP meetings are presented and perceived as an information treatment, and our results are consistent with this interpretation. Parents are invited to the meeting to listen to 'insider' information and honest opinion on local secondary schools from peers who have recently chosen them. Consistently, parents declare to rely on MTP as a source of information. About 40% of survey respondents list MTP as one of the sources they mostly rely on, with only school open days and other parents' opinion scoring higher.[42] Learning about local schools reportedly has an impact on parents' choices, in line with our main results, as 90% of respondents declare to have changed their mind after attending the meetings.[43] In line with this hypothesis, we estimate larger MTP effects for parents with likely weaker knowledge of the local school market, either because of their ethnicity, language, or residential location (see Section 5.3).

Parents reportedly value a wide array of school attributes not necessarily correlated with academic performance. Most sought-after school attributes include, e.g., welcoming atmosphere,

[40] Assuming the average competition effect is similar between exposed and unexposed parents, a one standard deviation higher exposure to treated peers increases enrolment of non-treated parents at MTP-promoted schools by 1.5 pp ($= 0.55 + 0.95$), almost half the direct impact of the programme.

[41] We report data for a survey administered in 2019. We collect a sample of 195 survey responses, reporting opinions for 20 primary schools, of about 50% of parents participating to the meetings.

[42] Panel A of Figure 2, plots the share of respondents who answered 5 to the following question: *"How much do you rely on the following sources of information? 1 = not at all and 5 = a lot"*.

[43] Two-thirds of them report an improved perception of local secondary schools, while the remaining started to consider schools they had previously ruled out.

inclusive ethos or pastoral care, while academic performance is among the ones least-frequently mentioned (Panel B of Figure 2). Combined with results in Panel A, where school performance tables are not among the most cited sources of information, survey evidence suggests that parents seek to learn about hard-to-find non-test score school attributes by participating to the meetings.

MTP provides information on day-to-day life at local state schools that are hard to gather elsewhere. We document this by analysing which are the words that are most mentioned during MTP meetings. Figure 7 (Panel A) shows that while on average about 66% of the words that are said during MTP meetings concern the atmosphere and environment of the promoted secondary schools, only about 27% of the words concern student performance (and the remaining 7% concern teachers).[44] On one hand, panel discussion focused on attributes such as school values, enforcement of discipline, safety or available outdoor space. On the other hand, information on school performance or peer quality are already widespread through performance tables and rarely mentioned at the meetings. Figure 7 (Panel B) further shows that specific attributes discussed at the meetings are, amongst others, student behaviour, support and well-being, school bullying and lunch policies, as well as creativity and friendliness.

In conclusion, when combined with our results, survey evidence and text analysis of meetings' minutes suggest parents respond to hard-to-find information on non-test score school attributes.[45]

7 Cost-Benefit Analysis

We finally present a back-of-the-envelope calculation of the benefits and costs of MTP from the perspective of the secondary state school system. This exercise is aimed at informing interested stakeholders, such as parental organisations, state schools and LAs, which could consider the possibility of implementing similar programs. Indeed, beyond providing parents with information they value, programs such as MTP could represent an opportunity for secondary schools

[44] Atmosphere and environment include all words that can be traced to the following categories: welcoming atmosphere, neighbourhood characteristics, inclusive ethos, pastoral care, discipline, extra activities and facilities. Performance includes achievement, curriculum and how the school stretches high achievers. Uncategorised words were excluded from the count. Words were extracted from meeting minutes of the 2020 MTP round. A complete description of the extraction process, text selection and word categorisation is provided in Appendix C.

[45] Another possible mechanism that may (partly) explain our results is that, through interaction with motivated peers that chose public-sector education, MTP may have relaxed parental prejudice against state-funded schools. With available data, we are not in a position to offer evidence about this hypothesis.

to raise additional resources and improve their finances.

We begin by calculating the average benefits implied by our estimates. On average, 1 additional student enrols into state-funded schools per MTP meeting. Considering 2014, the first year where MTP was scaled up to reach several local primary schools, this would imply 10 additional students opting for the state sector (see Figure 1). The $2020-2021$ London average of the per-pupil secondary school funding allocation stands at about £6,913. Using this figure, we obtain an overall increase in state-school funding of 69,130 for 2014. Assuming a constant effect of MTP throughout the period of our analysis after the pilot phase ($2014-2018$) implies an overall increase in funding available to secondary school of £587,605.[46]

Increased enrolment 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 that is, responding to an increase in enrolment by increasing the number of classes and, therefore, teaching staff. Hence, 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 estimate that 'fixed costs' represent about 32% of 'running costs', that is school expenses excluding staff.[47] Under these assumptions, one additional pupil drives an increase of about £1,520 (£129,200 overall) in terms of running costs.[48] Finally, secondary schools pay £380 to enter the meeting.

Overall, this exercise suggests that the state school sector have largely benefited from MTP, with a net gain of about £318,945 over the 5 years of the program.[49] The increase in school

[46]The overall increase in resources is obtained multiplying £6,913 by the total number of meetings in $2014-2018$, which are 85 (Figure 1). Updated LA and school funding allocations can be found here: https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/school-funding-2021-22-find-constituency-and-school-level-allocations/. This interactive website - and the data publicly available following the link - 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.

[47]We follow the categorisation 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. We calculate the share of 'fixed costs' over the total of running costs using aggregate figures for England available at the same link. Among running costs we include: cleaning and caretaking, water and sewerage, energy, rates, other occupation costs, learning resources (not ICT), ICT learning resources, examination fees, administrative supplies, other insurance premiums, 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 interest, community focused extended school staff and costs.

[48]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. We obtain £1,520 by multiplying £1,340 by 0.68 (share of non-fixed running costs) and then convert the resulting amount in 2021 pounds using the CPI deflator.

[49]This is obtained by subtracting total running costs and total participation costs from the total increase in funding available. Total participation costs are obtained multiplying £380 by the secondary school/meeting com-

resources can benefit all state-school students and mitigate concerns about schools' financial viability. This suggests that relatively simple and low-cost interventions providing parents with hard-to-find information on school attributes they value can improve state-school finances and weaken concerns about adverse effects of school choice on educational stratification and inequality.

8 Conclusion

In this paper, we look at how the provision of hard-to-find information on non-test score attributes affects school choice. We evaluate an information intervention in the London Borough of Camden, named Meet The Parents, which provided parents with information on environment and atmosphere at local state-funded secondary schools that is typically not possible to obtain from more traditional sources. Our difference-in-differences design compares enrolment decision of parents attending a primary school organising an MTP meeting to those of parents attending schools located in the same educational market which did not participate to MTP.

We find that MTP increased the probability of enrolling into state-funded secondary schools by about 2.8%. Results are driven by students with high academic ability and with high socioeconomic status. The programme shifts parents towards state schools that seem to be closer substitute to private schools, e.g., high-performing schools and those providing single-sex education. We interpret this evidence as showing that parents do not value private school *per se* but rather are interested in a number of school attributes such as discipline, inclusiveness or safety, and once provided with information on these traits they are more likely to choose state-funded schools. Survey evidence and text analysis of MTP meetings minutes further corroborate this interpretation.

Our results have important policy implications, as estimated impacts of MTP suggest that low-cost interventions may affect parental choices, thereby improving state school finances and student composition. MTP-style interventions can therefore weaken concerns about adverse effects of school choice on educational stratification and inequality (Hsieh and Urquiola, 2006; Laverde, 2020). At the same time, MTP may affect achievement outcomes of students whose families opt for the state sector. Investigating long-term effects of MTP may be an interesting direction for future work.

bination (= 367), since participating secondaries pay the entry fee *per-meeting*.

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Table 1. Descriptive statistics for primary and secondary schools

	(1) Participating schools	(2) Non-participating Camden schools	(3) Schools in bordering LAs
		Panel A. Primary schools	
% FSM eligible	0.340	0.467	0.309
	(0.168)	(0.152)	(0.165)
% with special education needs	0.260	0.423	0.329
	(0.09)	(0.294)	(0.189)
% white	0.508	0.326	0.397
	(0.184)	(0.184)	(0.224)
% native speaker	0.603	0.428	0.575
	(0.205)	(0.179)	(0.212)
average English grade (s.d.)	0.203	-0.177	-0.054
	(0.367)	(0.373)	(0.425)
average math grade (s.d.)	0.131	-0.194	-0.059
	(0.318)	(0.339)	(0.435)
average school-home distance	0.895	0.994	1.08
	(0.409)	(0.599)	(0.516)
enrolment count per grade	39.652	30.331	45.838
	(13.638)	(16.482)	(21.674)
N	30	16	352
		Panel B. Secondary schools	
% FSM eligible	0.412		0.352
	(0.123)		(0.179)
% with special education needs	0.266		0.431
	(0.073)		(0.309)
% white	0.386		0.351
	(0.162)		(0.196)
% native	0.502		0.507
	(0.184)		(0.210)
average English grade (s.d.)	0.120		0.200
	(0.376)		(0.805)
average math grade (s.d.)	0.077		0.204
	(0.326)		(0.792)
average school-home distancea	1.693		2.739
	(0.627)		(1.666)
enrolment count per grade	165.541		143.719
	(42.861)		(83.716)
N	20		96

Note. This table shows descriptive statistics for schools considered in the analysis. Statistics are computed considering the 2007-2013 period, preceding the introduction of MTP. Panel A describes primary schools. Participating institutions (column 1) are state primary schools organising at least one MTP event between 2013-2018. Other primary schools in Camden and in bordering local authorities are described in column (2) and (3), respectively. Panel B describes state secondary schools promoted in at least one MTP meeting between 2013-2018 (column 1) or not participating to MTP and located in bordering local authorities (column 3). Presented are sample averages considering one observation per school. Standard deviations are reported in parentheses.

Table 2. Average effects of MTP

	Dependent variable: enrolment indicator at secondary school			
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
		Panel A. State-funded school		
MTP	0.014	0.006	0.025**	0.024**
	(0.014)	(0.011)	(0.010)	(0.010)
		Panel B. MTP-promoted school		
MTP	0.551***	0.126***	0.015	0.014
	(0.035)	(0.022)	(0.013)	(0.012)
		Panel C. State-funded school in Camden		
MTP	0.592***	0.111***	0.013	0.013
	(0.044)	(0.020)	(0.010)	(0.009)
		Panel D. State-funded school in Camden's bordering LAs		
MTP	-0.499***	-0.096***	0.012	0.011
	(0.037)	(0.022)	(0.010)	(0.010)
Observations	180,398	180,398	180,398	180,398
Year FE	Y	Y	Y	Y
Census block (LSOA) FE	N	Y	Y	Y
Primary school FE	N	N	Y	Y
Individual and primary school characteristics	N	N	N	Y

Note. The table shows DID estimates of the impact of MTP on the probability of attending a secondary state-funded school (Panel A), a school promoted suring MTP meetings (Panel B), a state-funded school located in Camden (Panel C) or in bordering LAs (Panel D). Column (1) controls for year fixed effects only; column (2) adds block (LSOA) fixed effects; column (3) adds school fixed effects; column (4) adds controls for individual characteristics (gender, ethnicity, language spoken at home, subsidised lunches eligibility and special educational needs) and school and block characteristics (quadratic polynomials in enrolment and number of children, respectively). Standard errors are clustered on schools and reported in parentheses. *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1.

Table 3. MTP effect by school quality

	Dependent variable: enrolment indicator at secondary school			
	School performance in top quartile	School performance in bottom quartile	Oversubscribed schools	Undersubscribed schools
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
	Panel A. State-funded school			
MTP	0.048**	0.017	0.029*	-0.029*
	(0.022)	(0.020)	(0.016)	(0.016)
	Panel B. MTP-promoted school			
MTP	0.044**	0.002	0.038**	-0.051***
	(0.021)	(0.021)	(0.015)	(0.014)
	Panel C. State-funded school in Camden			
MTP	0.063***	-0.002	0.041***	-0.047***
	(0.017)	(0.021)	(0.014)	(0.015)
	Panel D. State-funded school in Camden's neighbouring LAs			
MTP	-0.027*	0.023**	-0.013	0.022*
	(0.015)	(0.011)	(0.009)	(0.012)
Observations	125,997	125,997	156,304	156,304
Year FE	Y	Y	Y	Y
Census block (LSOA) FE	Y	Y	Y	Y
Primary school FE	Y	Y	Y	Y
Individual and primary school characteristics	Y	Y	Y	Y

Note. The table shows DID estimates of the impact of MTP on the probability of attending a secondary state-funded school (Panel A), a school promoted suring MTP meetings (Panel B), a state-funded school located in Camden (Panel C) or in bordering LAs (Panel D). Dependent variables in columns (1) and (2) are enrolment into schools scoring in the top and bottom quartile of KS4 math tests, respectively. Dependent variables in columns (3) and (4) are enrolment into oversubscribed and undersubscribed schools, respectively. All columns control for year, block (LSOA) and school fixed effects, as well as controls for individual characteristics (gender, ethnicity, language spoken at home, subsidised lunches eligibility and special educational needs) and school and block characteristics (quadratic polynomials in enrolment and number of children, respectively). Standard errors are clustered on schools and reported in parentheses. *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1.

Table 4. MTP effect by school type

	Dependent variable: enrolment indicator at secondary school				
	Community school	Faith schools	Academy	Foundation school	Single-sex school
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
MTP	0.052***	0.071***	-0.192***	0.093***	0.059***
	(0.016)	(0.012)	(0.022)	(0.013)	(0.014)
Observations	180,398	180,398	180,398	180,398	180,398
Year FE	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Census block (LSOA) FE	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Primary school FE	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Individual and primary school characteristics	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y

Note. The table shows DID estimates of the impact of MTP on the probability of attending a secondary state-funded community school (column 1), faith ("voluntary aided") school (column 2), academy school (column 3), foundation school (column 4) and single-sex school (column 5). All columns control for year, block (LSOA) and school fixed effects, as well as controls for individual characteristics (gender, ethnicity, language spoken at home, subsidised lunches eligibility and special educational needs) and school and block characteristics (quadratic polynomials in enrolment and number of children, respectively). Standard errors are clustered on schools and reported in parentheses. *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1.

Table 5. MTP effect by school composition

	Dependent variable: school intake at baseline			
	Special needs share	Free lunch share	White share	English-speaking share
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
MTP	-0.011***	-0.008	-0.011**	-0.006
	(0.003)	(0.006)	(0.005)	(0.005)
Observations	161,931	161,931	161,931	161,931
Year FE	Y	Y	Y	Y
Census block (LSOA) FE	Y	Y	Y	Y
Primary school FE	Y	Y	Y	Y
Individual and primary school characteristics	Y	Y	Y	Y

Note. The table shows DID estimates of how MTP affects the characteristics of the chosen secondary state-funded school. Column (1) considers the share of students with special educational needs; column (2) considers the share of students eligible for subsidised lunches; column (3) considers the share of white students; column (4) considers the share of native students. All columns control for year, block (LSOA) and school fixed effects, as well as controls for individual characteristics (gender, ethnicity, language spoken at home, subsidised lunches eligibility and special educational needs) and school and block characteristics (quadratic polynomials in enrolment and number of children, respectively). The sample includes only students attending state-funded schools. Standard errors are clustered on schools and reported in parentheses. *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1.

Table 6. Heterogeneous effects of MTP by student characteristics

	Dependent variable: enrolment indicator at secondary school									
	FSM eligible		Top achiever in Maths		Asian		English-speaking		Mover	
	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)	(10)
					Panel A. State-funded school					
MTP	0.005	0.036***	0.117***	0.010	0.032***	0.022*	0.019	0.037***	0.033***	0.020*
	(0.008)	(0.012)	(0.029)	(0.007)	(0.012)	(0.011)	(0.012)	(0.010)	(0.009)	(0.011)
					Panel B. MTP-promoted school					
MTP	-0.005	0.027*	0.177***	0.002	0.049***	0.007	0.014	0.018	0.027	0.009
	(0.016)	(0.015)	(0.027)	(0.015)	(0.016)	(0.014)	(0.015)	(0.016)	(0.017)	(0.014)
					Panel C. State-funded school in Camden					
MTP	-0.009	0.029**	0.144***	-0.001	0.034**	0.006	0.005	0.023*	0.022	0.010
	(0.015)	(0.012)	(0.028)	(0.014)	(0.017)	(0.011)	(0.013)	(0.012)	(0.015)	(0.011)
					Panel D. State-funded school in Camden's neighbouring LAs					
MTP	0.022	0.003	-0.035	0.012	0.018	0.011	0.012	0.016	0.014	0.009
	(0.017)	(0.013)	(0.031)	(0.016)	(0.016)	(0.011)	(0.016)	(0.012)	(0.017)	(0.012)
Observations	50,052	130,018	36,596	117,943	29,779	150,326	101,464	78,512	52,028	128,008
Year FE	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Census block (LSOA) FE	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Primary school FE	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Individual and primary school characteristics	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y

Note. The table shows DID estimates of the impact of MTP on the probability of attending a secondary state-funded school for different samples of children. Columns (1) and (2) consider subsidised lunches eligibility; columns (3) and (4) consider KS2 test scores; columns (5) and (6) consider asian ethnicity; columns (7) and (8) consider student's country of origin; columns (9) and (10) consider students who have changed residence during primary school; columns (11) and (12) consider gender. All columns control for year, block (LSOA) and school fixed effects, as well as controls for individual characteristics (gender, ethnicity, language spoken at home, subsidised lunches eligibility and special educational needs) and school and block characteristics (quadratic polynomials in enrolment and number of children, respectively). Standard errors are clustered on schools and reported in parentheses. *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1.

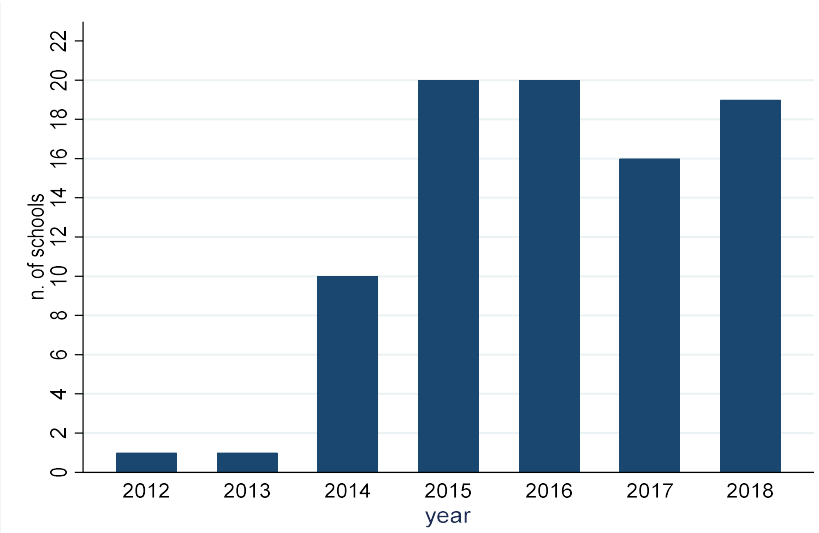
Table 7. Direct and indirect effects of MTP

	Dependent variable: enrolment indicator at secondary school		
	All schools	Oversubscribed schools	Undersubscribed schools
	(1)	(2)	(3)
	Panel A. State-funded school		
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. MTP-promoted school		
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)
	Panel C. State-funded school in Camden		
MTP	0.0371**	0.0425**	-0.0180
	(0.0148)	(0.0184)	(0.0227)
MTPI	0.0027	0.0096***	-0.0069*
	(0.0028)	(0.0026)	(0.0035)
MTP*MTPI	-0.0076**	-0.0094***	0.0004
	(0.0034)	(0.0030)	(0.0044)
	Panel D. State-funded school in Camden's neighbouring LAs		
MTP	-0.0084	-0.0105	-0.0035
	(0.0137)	(0.0148)	(0.0209)
MTPI	0.0002	-0.0032	0.0030
	(0.0031)	(0.0022)	(0.0032)
MTP*MTPI	0.0045	0.0025	0.0029
	(0.0035)	(0.0029)	(0.0041)
Observations	164,938	144,198	144,198
Year FE	Y	Y	Y
Census block (LSOA) FE	Y	Y	Y
Primary school FE	Y	Y	Y
Individual and primary school characteristics	Y	Y	Y

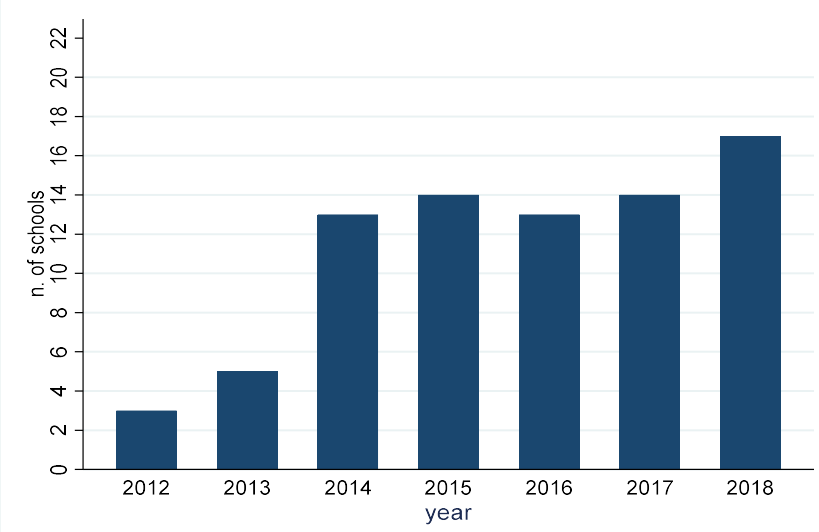
Note. The table shows DID estimates of the direct and indirect effects of MTP on the probability of attending a secondary state-funded school (Panel A), a school promoted suring MTP meetings (Panel B), a state-funded school located in Camden (Panel C) or in bordering LAs (Panel D). Dependent variables in columns (2) and (3) are indicators for enrolment into oversubscribed and undersubscribed schools, respectively. All columns control for year, block (LSOA) and school fixed effects, as well as controls for individual characteristics (gender, ethnicity, language spoken at home, subsidised lunches eligibility and special educational needs) and school and block characteristics (quadratic polynomials in enrolment and number of children, respectively). Standard errors are clustered on schools and reported in parentheses. *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1.

Figure 1. Rollout of MTP

Panel A. Primary schools



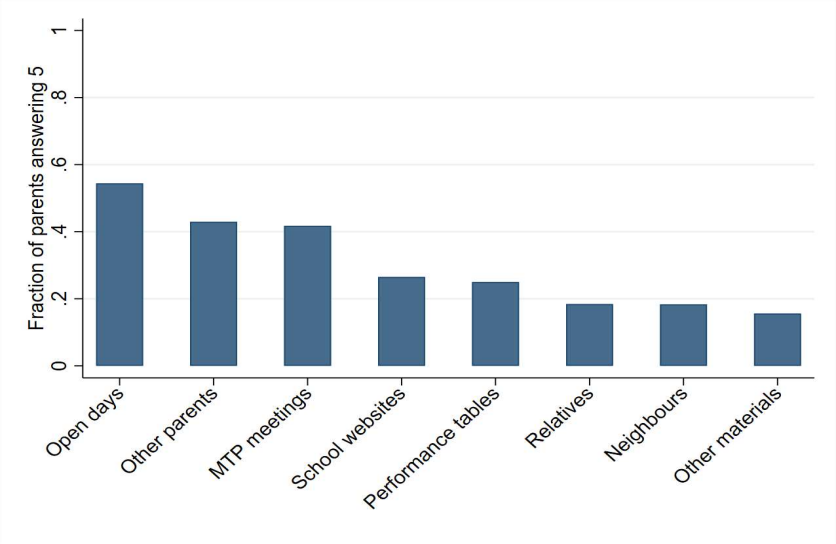
Panel B. Secondary schools



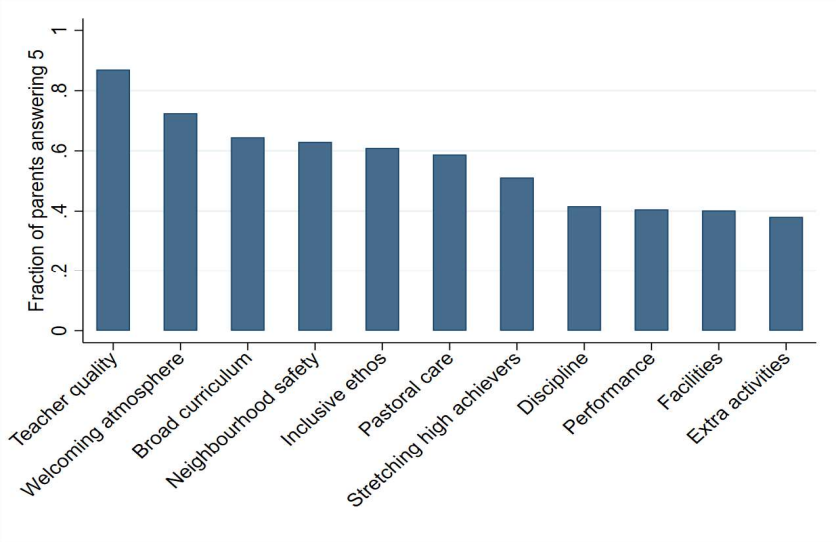
Note. The figure shows the number of primary schools (Panel A) and secondary schools (Panel B) participating to the MTP programme by meeting year.

Figure 2. The role of information sources and school attributes in parental choice

Panel A. Sources of information

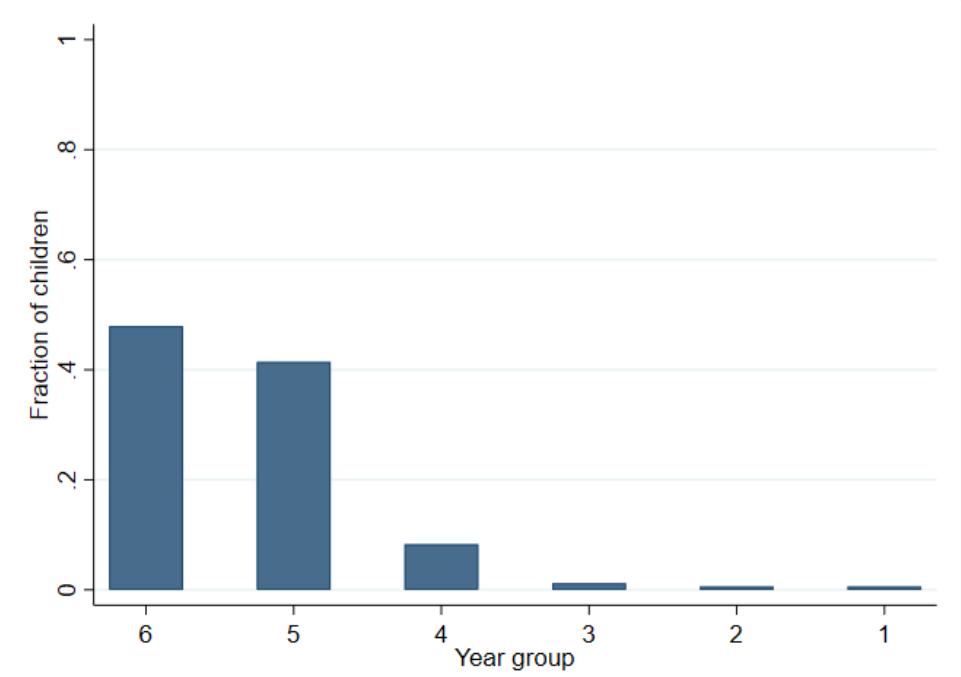


Panel B. School attributes valued by parents



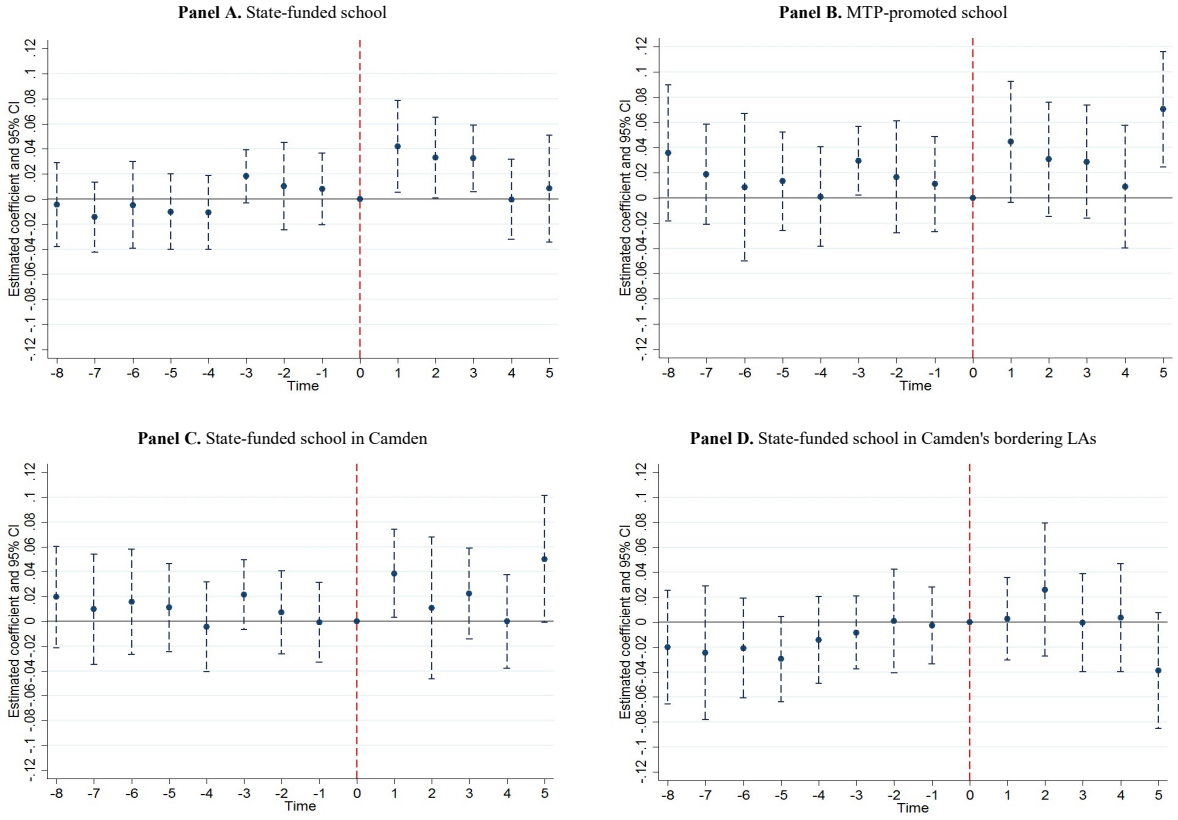
Note. The figure shows the fraction of parents valuing different sources of information (Panel A) and different school attributes (Panel B) when they choose a secondary school for their children. Answers were collected through a survey administered to parents attending MTP meeting in 2019, the latest programme wave. See Sectiuon 6 for definitions and details.

Figure 3. Participation to MTP meetings by year group



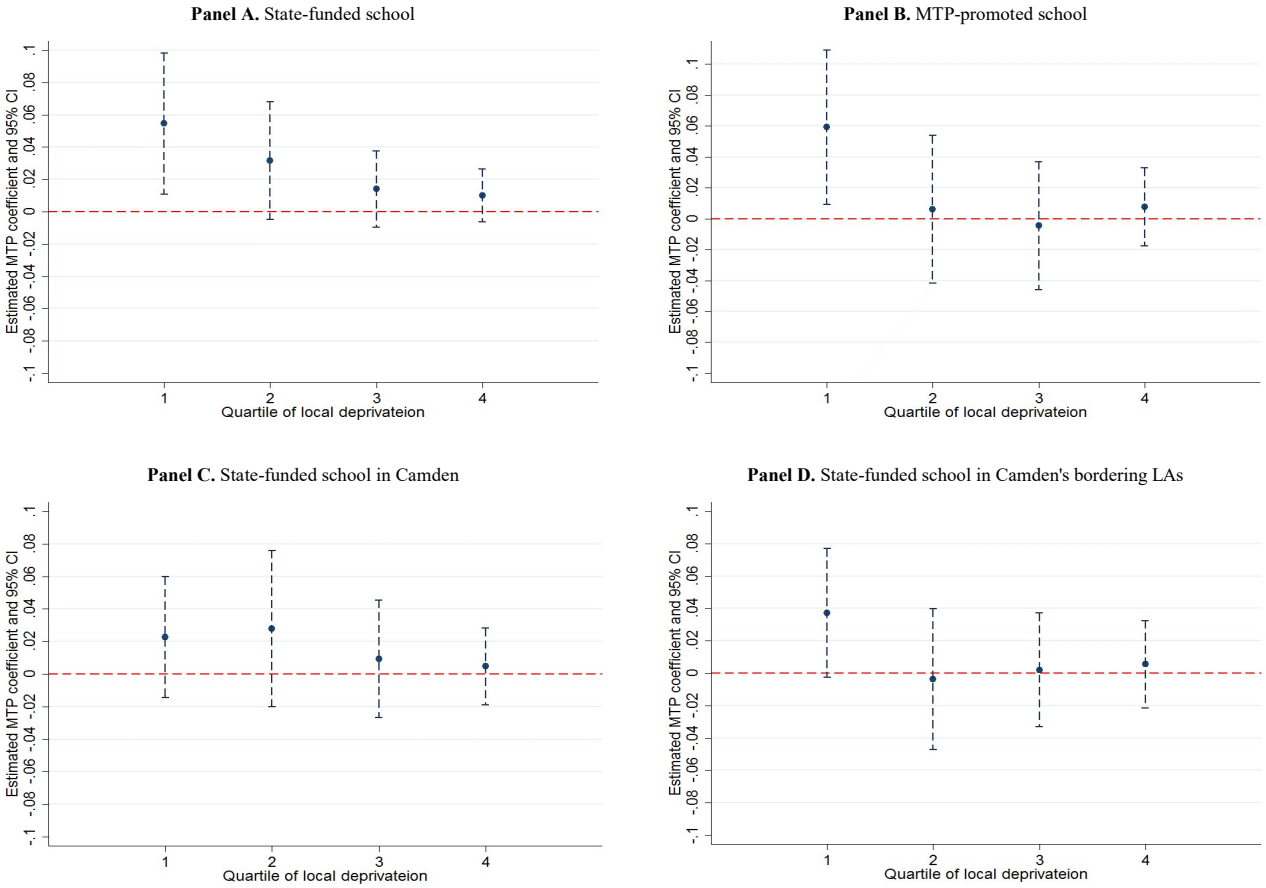
Note. The figure shows the fraction of children whose parents attended an MTP meeting by grade (year group) of enrolment. Answers were collected through a survey administered to parents attending MTP meeting in 2019. See Section 2.3 for details.

Figure 4. MTP effects over time



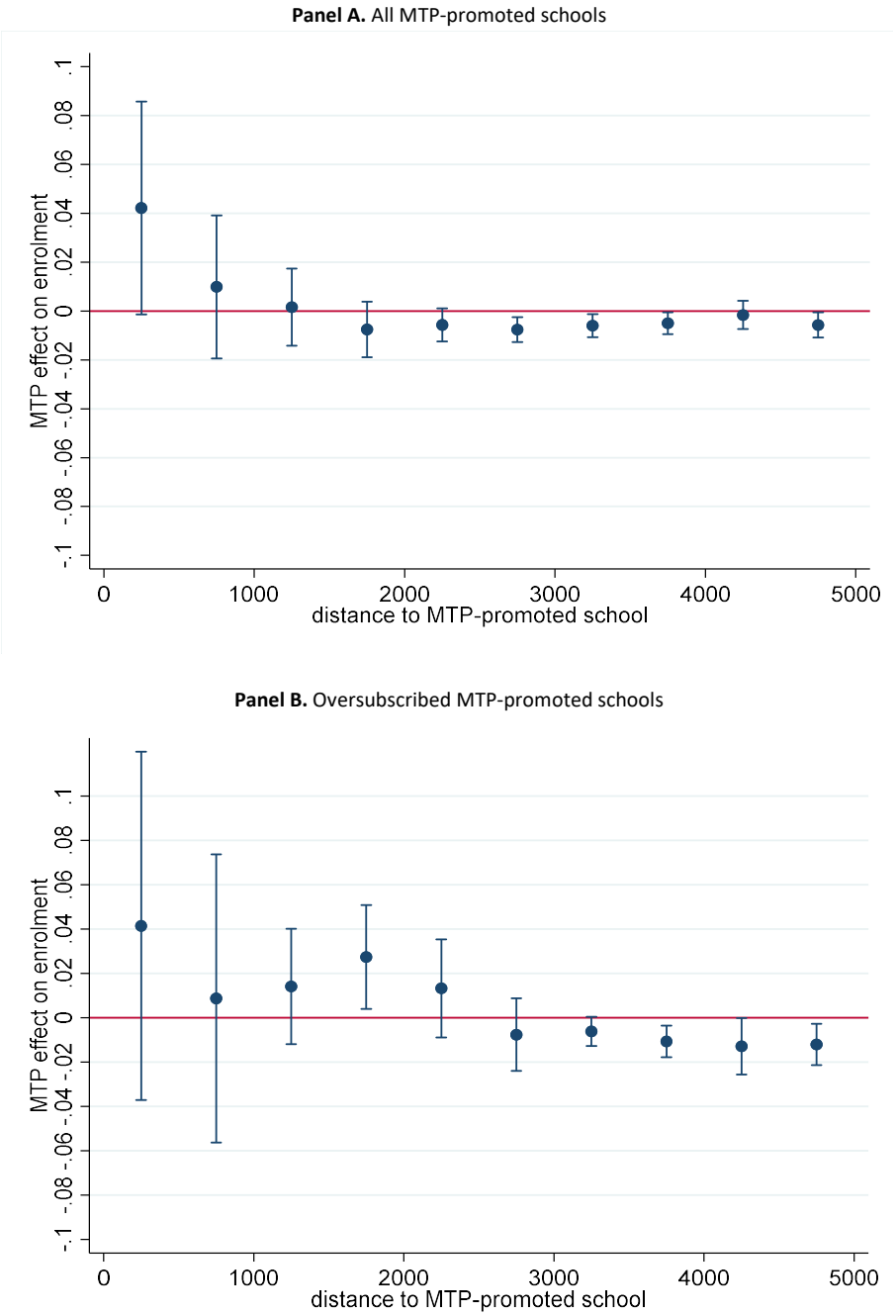
Note. The figure shows event graphs of student enrolment outcomes around the time of entrance into the MTP programme. The sample considered is formed by students completing primary education in Camden or bordering school districts. Time on the horizontal axis is computed subtracting the year where a given school entered MTP to the year of the observation. Control group students are considered in every time building placebo events. The figure plots time-specific coefficient of MTP treatment effect estimated from equation (2), along with 95% confidence intervals. Panel A considers enrolment into any state-funded secondary school, Panel B considers MTP-promoted schools, Panel C considers enrolment into any state-funded secondary school in Camden, and Panel D considers enrolment into any state-funded secondary school in Camden or bordering LAs. Enrolment is measured at the first year of secondary school. See Section 4 for details.

Figure 5. MTP effect by local area deprivation



Note. The figure shows heterogeneous effects of the MTP programme on student enrolment by deprivation in local area (LSOA). The sample considered is formed by students completing primary education in Camden or bordering school districts. Quartile of deprivation is plotted on the horizontal axis. Deprivation is measured by the IDACI index, based on average family income in the area. The figure plots coefficients from equation (1) estimated seprately by deprivation quartile, along with 95% confidence intervals. Panel A considers enrolment into any state-funded secondary school, Panel B considers MTP-promoted schools, Panel C considers enrolment into any state-funded secondary school in Camden, and Panel D considers enrolment into any state-funded secondary school in Camden or bordering LAs. Enrolment is measured at the first year of secondary school. See Section 5 for details.

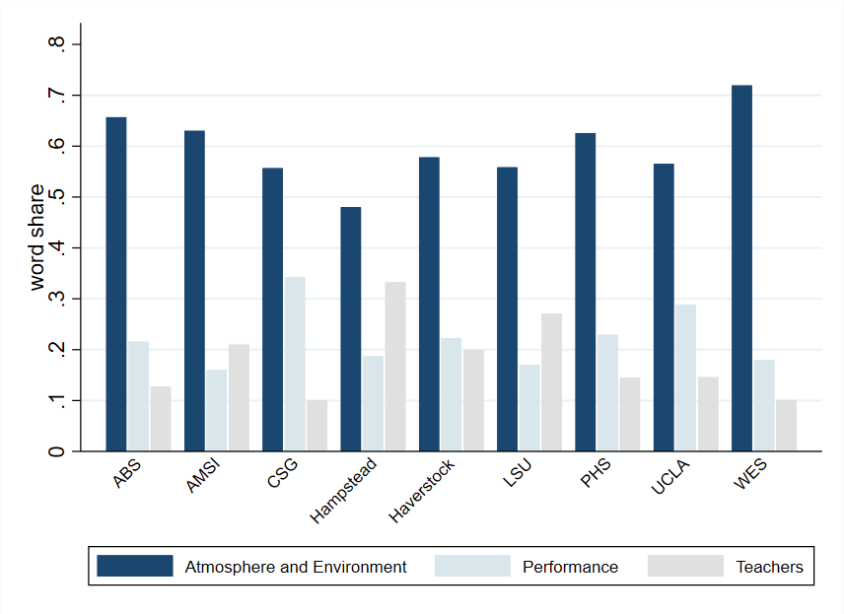
Figure 6. MTP effect by distance to school



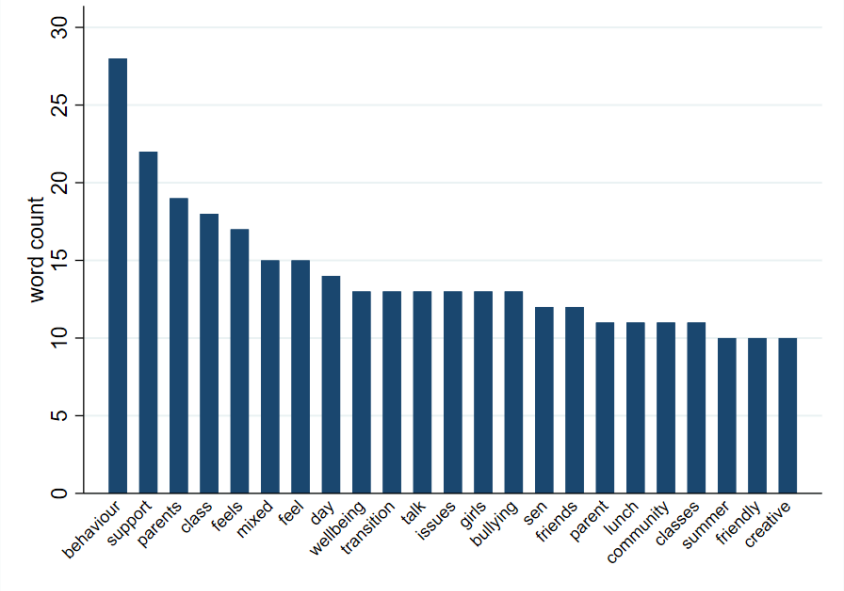
Note. The figure shows DID estimates of the impact of MTP on the probability of attending a secondary state-funded school promoted during MTP meetings. Plotted are coefficients from regressions similar to column (4) of Table 2, augmented with interactions between post-treatment indicator, MTP-exposure indicator, and home-school distance band indicators. Distance bands considered are 500-meter wide and coefficients are plotted at the central point of each band (e.g., the 0-500 meters coefficient is reported at a value of 250 of the x-axis). To plot this figure, a student-secondary-school level dataset is constructed by appending student-level records reporting home-school distance to each of the 22 secondary schools promoted during MTP meetings. Students residing further than 5 km from the school are not included. Outcome variable is a dummy indicating enrolment at the promoted secondary school considered, where Panel A includes all promoted institutions and Panel B restricts to oversubscribed promoted schools. The 95% confidence interval for each coefficient is plotted. See Section 5 for details.

Figure 7. Words mentioned during MTP meetings

Panel A. Topics discussed during MTP meetings



Panel B. Most-mentioned words on atmosphere and environment



Note. The figure shows the share of words concerning school atmosphere and environment vis-a-vis performance and teachers (Panel A) and the words with at least 10 mentions within the atmosphere and environment category (Panel B) Separate bars in Panel A are plotted by represented secondary school. Words were extracted from 2020 MTP meeting minutes separately for each MTP-promoted secondary school they were said in reference to. Uncategorised words (e.g. verbs) were excluded from the analysis. See Appendix C for details. The total number of words considered is 1,639, while the total number of words regarding atmosphere and environment, performance and teachers are 1,109, 414 and 116 respectively. Atmosphere and environment include all words that can be traced to the following categories: welcoming atmosphere, neighbourhood characteristics, inclusive ethos, pastoral care, discipline, extra activities and facilities. Performance includes achievement, curriculum and how the school stretches high achievers.

Appendix A Additional Tables and Figures

Table A.1. Treated and control groups by year

	Number of:	
Year	Control students	Treated students
(1)	(2)	(3)
2006	16,743	0
2007	16,652	0
2008	17,083	0
2009	16,887	0
2010	16,695	0
2011	17,068	0
2012	16,759	58
2013	16,970	56
2014	17,325	476
2015	17,221	909
2016	17,916	943
2017	18,486	591
2018	18,832	957
Total	224,637	3,990

Note. The table shows n. of students in treatment and control group by year. Treatment group is defined as all students in a Year 5 or Year 6 when a MTP meeting is organised at their primary school. Control group is all other students enrolled in the same grades in a primary school in Camden or in bordering LAs. See Section 4 for details.

Table A.2. Effects of MTP on parental preference for state-funded schools

	Dependent variable: preference or enrolment indicator for secondary school						
	1st choice is a MTP-promoted school (1)	1st, 2nd or 3rd choice is a MTP-promoted school (2)	1st choice is a Camden school (3)	1st, 2nd or 3rd choice is a Camden school (4)	Enrolment at private school despite offered a state school (5)	Enrolment at private school despite offered a MTP-promoted school (6)	Enrolment at private school despite offered a Camden school (7)
MTP	-0.015	-0.015*	0.003	0.018*	-0.038***	-0.031***	-0.026*
	(0.012)	(0.009)	(0.010)	(0.010)	(0.010)	(0.012)	(0.013)
Observations	63,358	63,358	63,358	63,358	62,882	5,474	13,384
Year FE	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Census block (LSOA) 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 the impact of MTP on the parental preferences for schools. Dependent variables in columns (1) and (2) are indicator for first choice school or one of the top three preferences being a MTP-promoted school, respectively. Dependent variables in columns (3) and (4) are indicator for first choice school or one of the top three preferences being a Camden school, respectively. All columns control for year, block (LSOA) and school fixed effects, as well as controls for individual characteristics (gender, ethnicity, language spoken at home, subsidised lunches eligibility and special educational needs) and school and block characteristics (quadratic polynomials in enrolment and number of children, respectively). Standard errors are clustered on schools and reported in parentheses. *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1.

Table A.3. Effects of MTP by parental participation to the meetings

	Dep. Var.: enrolment indicator at secondary school
	(1)
Panel A. State-funded school	
MTP	0.030***
	(0.011)
MTP*High_participation	-0.018
	(0.011)
Panel B. MTP-promoted school	
MTP	0.017
	(0.013)
MTP*High_participation	-0.009
	(0.016)
Panel C. State-funded school in Camden	
MTP	0.012
	(0.010)
MTP*High_participation	0.001
	(0.020)
Panel D. State-funded school in Camden's bordering LAs	
MTP	0.018*
	(0.010)
MTP*High_participation	-0.019
	(0.015)
Observations	180,398
Year FE	Y
Census block (LSOA) FE	Y
Primary school FE	Y
Individual and primary school characteristics	Y

Note. The table shows DID estimates of the heterogenous impact of MTP on secondary school enrolment by parental participation to the meeting. Dependent variables follow the ones in Table 2. Reported are estimates from equation (4) augmented with an interaction term between the MTP treatment indicator and a dummy variable equal to one if the number of parents participating to the meeting are above the median. Standard errors are clustered on schools and reported in parentheses. *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1.

Figure A.1. MTP Meetings

Note. The figure shows an example of an MTP meeting.

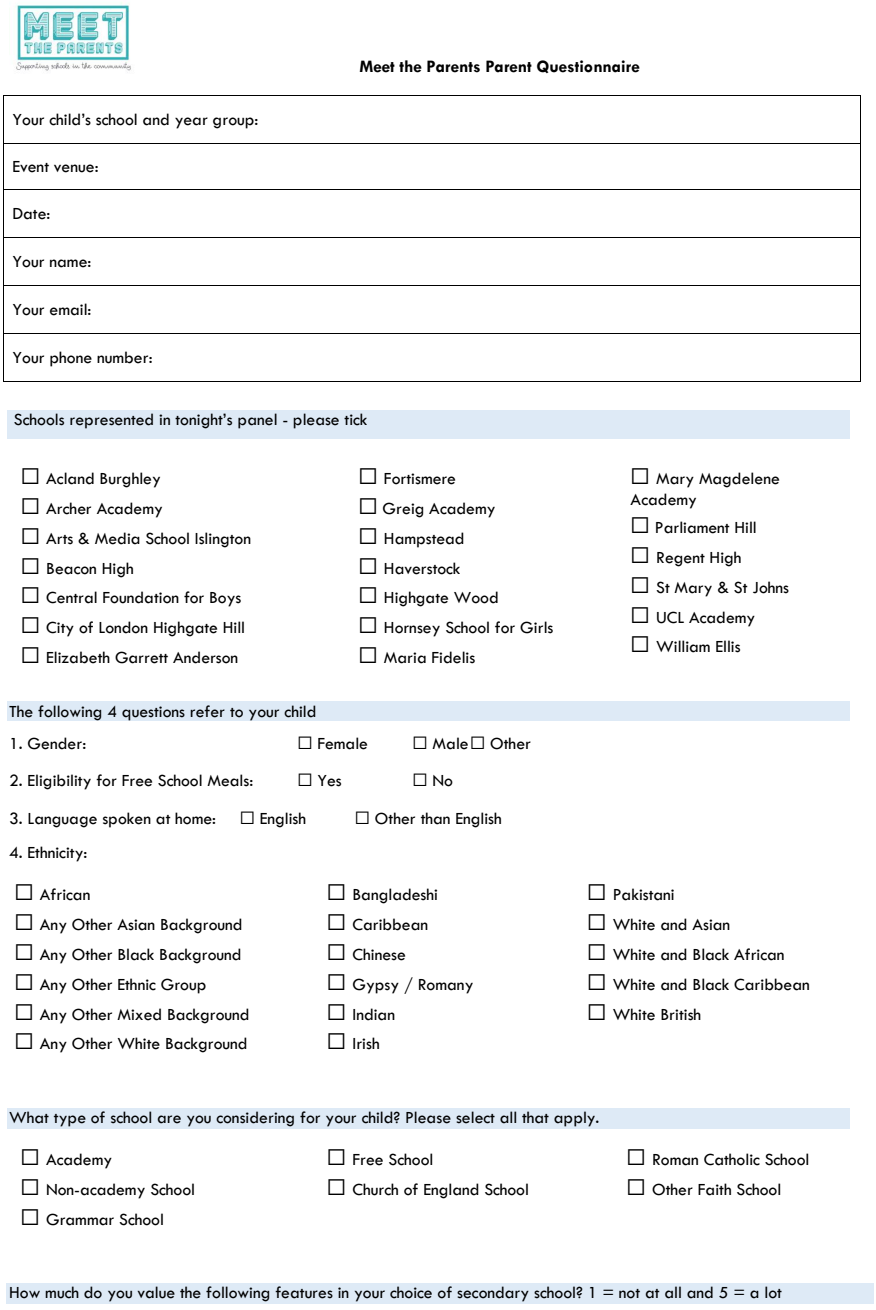
Figure A.2. MTP Meetings: panellists and attendees

Panel A. Parents and students in the panel

Panel B. Parents and students in the audience

Note. The figure shows an example of the structure of MTP meetings.

Figure A.3. Questionnaire administered to parents during MTP meetings (page 1)



MEET THE PARENTS

Supporting schools in the community

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

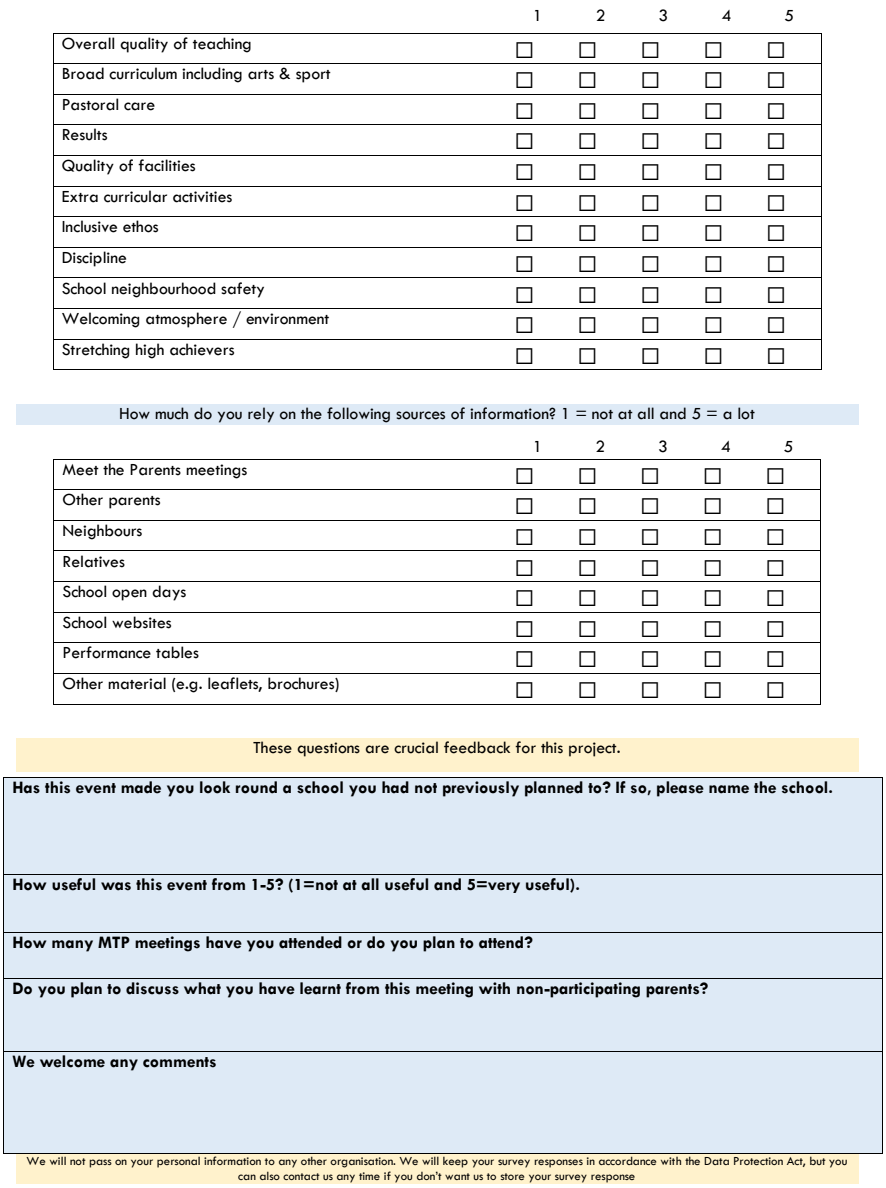
What type of school are you considering for your child? Please select all that apply.

- ☐ 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.4. 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

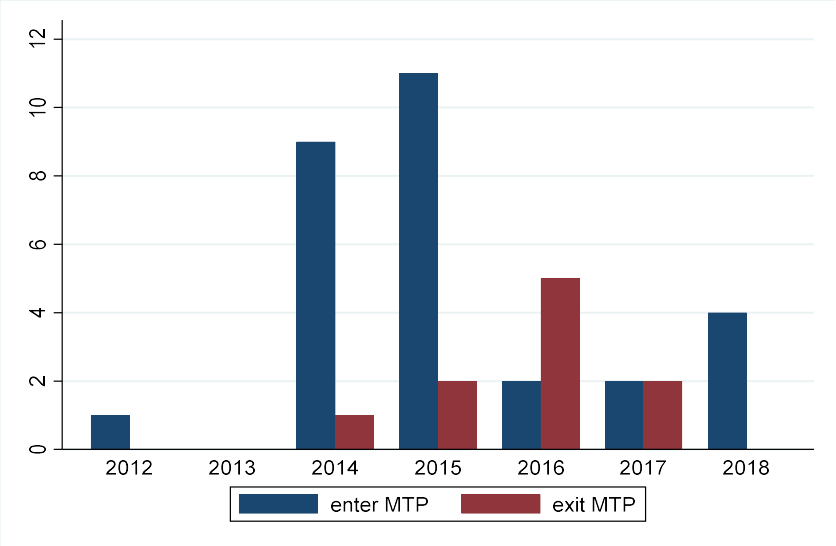
We will not pass on your personal information to any other organisation. We will keep your survey responses in accordance with the Data Protection Act, but you can also contact us any time if you don't want us to store your survey response

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

Figure A.5. Pre-trends for enrolment into a state-funded secondary school

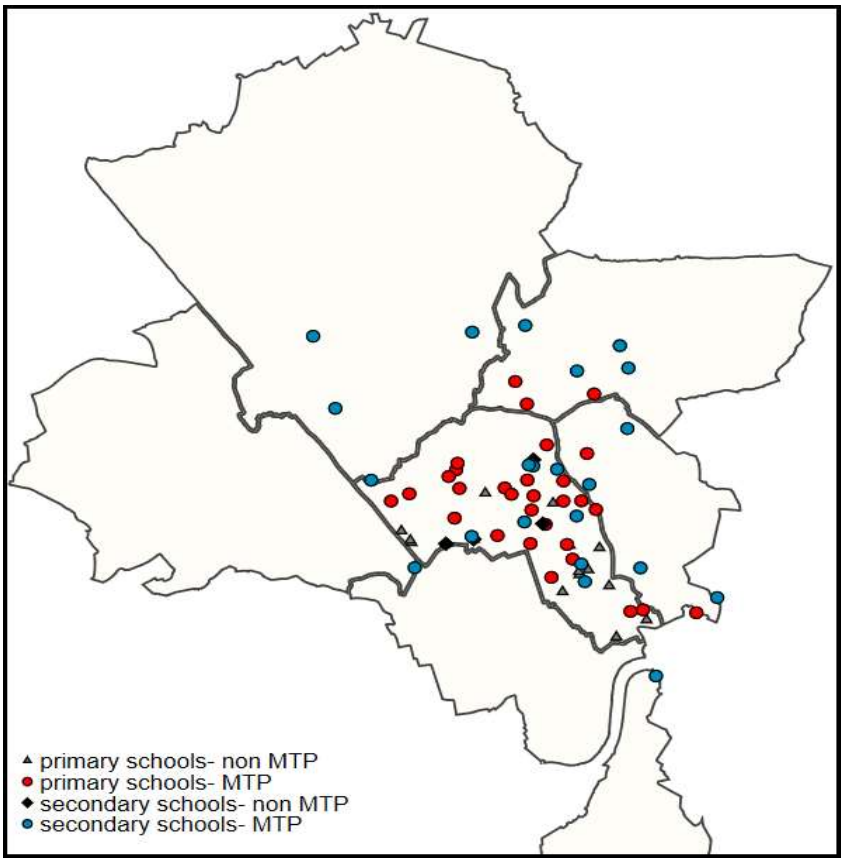
Note. The figure shows trends in student enrolment outcomes between 2006 and 2018. The sample considered is formed by students completing primary education in Camden or bordering school districts. Enrolment is measured at the first year of secondary school. See Section 4 for details.

Figure A.6. N. of schools entering and exiting MTP



Note. The figure shows the number of primary schools joining or leaving the MTP programme by meeting year.

Figure A.7. Geographical location of participating school



Note. The figure depicts geographical location of primary and secondary schools participating to MTP as well as non-participating institutions in the borough of Camden. Location is based on school postcode centroids. Represented are the borough of Camden, at the centre of the figure, and (from south, clockwise) the boroughs of Lambeth, Westminster, Brent, Barnet, Haringey and Islington.

Appendix B Robustness checks

We turn here to explore the sensitivity of our results to alternative empirical specifications and potential threats to the validity of our estimates. First, because of the voluntary participation to the programme on a annually basis, schools (and then students they serve) can in principle leave and re-enter treatment, possibly more than once. Over the years considered, 10 out 29 primary schools leave the treatment before the end of the sample period: 2 in 2017, 5 in 2016, 2 in 2015 and 1 in 2014 (see Figure A.6). Moreover, 1 school exits treatment in 2017 and re-enters in 2018. On the other hand, the vast majority of schools enter treatment by 2015 (1 in 2012, 9 in 2014 and 11 in 2015). In our main specifications of equation (3), we keep all entries and exits as the nature of MTP can lead to effects that are year-specific. However, exit from the programme may happen endogenously as a result of the programme's effectiveness. We therefore estimate equation (3) by assigning to treatment all schools starting from the first year in which an MTP meeting was conducted, and we consider them treated thereafter irrespectively of whether they exited the programme. This procedure yields an 'intention-to-treat' estimate of the effect of MTP. The results on main enrolment outcomes are substantially unchanged, as shown in Table B.1.

Second, the choice of the control group – which we define as students attending untreated primary schools in Camden or bordering districts – is a priori unclear. Hence, we test the sensitivity of our results by broadening the control group to include all students attending any state-funded primary school in London. Indeed, as secondary schools take up large cohorts and students located further away from the institution, the choice of the parents does not necessarily need to be restricted to the local districts. Effects of MTP on enrolment using this alternative control group are similar to those presented in Table 2 (see Table B.2).

Finally, we explore the sensitivity of our estimates to choices concerning the treatment group. First, we estimate equation (3) without considering the first two years of the programme, 2012 and 2013, when MTP events were held only at one school and the initiative was at a pilot stage. Results from this approach mirror our main findings and are presented in Table B.3. Second, to provide evidence in support of the assumption that the entire cohort of students was exposed to the treatment, we estimate heterogeneous effects by parental participation. We augment equation (3) with an interaction term between the treatment indicator and a dummy variable equal to one if the number of parents participating to the meeting is above the median. As can be seen in Table A.3, the interaction terms are small and not statistically significant for

all outcomes considered. This result implies that, in line with our assumption, MTP impacts parental choice regardless actual participation to the meetings, most likely due to informational spillovers within parents in the same school-grade.[1]

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

	Dependent variable: enrolment indicator at secondary school			
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
		Panel A. State-funded school		
MTP	0.015	0.004	0.024**	0.021**
	(0.012)	(0.009)	(0.010)	(0.009)
		Panel B. MTP-promoted school		
MTP	0.558***	0.135***	0.018	0.016
	(0.035)	(0.022)	(0.013)	(0.012)
		Panel C. State-funded school in Camden		
MTP	0.597***	0.118***	0.011	0.010
	(0.052)	(0.020)	(0.010)	(0.009)
		Panel D. State-funded school in Camden's bordering LAs		
MTP	-0.505***	-0.105***	0.014	0.013
	(0.042)	(0.021)	(0.013)	(0.013)
Observations	180,398	180,398	180,398	180,398
Year FE	Y	Y	Y	Y
Census block (LSOA) FE	N	Y	Y	Y
Primary school FE	N	N	Y	Y
Individual and primary school characteristics	N	N	N	Y

Note. The table shows DID estimates of the intetion-to-treat impact of MTP on secondary school enrolment. Specifications and table structure follow the ones of Table 2. Here we keep all students in the treatment group once their school enters the programme, regardless early exit from MTP. Standard errors are clustered on schools and reported in parentheses. *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1.

[1] Results considering the fraction of parents with respect to cohort size, rather than the absolute number of participants, are very similar and available upon request.

Table B.2. Effects of MTP with alternative control group

	Dependent variable: enrolment indicator at secondary school			
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
		Panel A. State-funded school		
MTP	0.021	0.014	0.033***	0.031***
	(0.014)	(0.011)	(0.010)	(0.010)
		Panel B. MTP-promoted school		
MTP	0.727***	0.137***	0.028**	0.027**
	(0.031)	(0.022)	(0.012)	(0.012)
		Panel C. State-funded school in Camden		
MTP	0.668***	0.113***	0.016	0.015
	(0.044)	(0.020)	(0.010)	(0.009)
		Panel D. State-funded school in Camden's bordering LAs		
MTP	0.054	-0.072***	0.026***	0.026***
	(0.034)	(0.022)	(0.010)	(0.009)
Observations	1,070,291	1,070,291	1,070,291	1,070,291
Year FE	Y	Y	Y	Y
Census block (LSOA) FE	N	Y	Y	Y
Primary school FE	N	N	Y	Y
Individual and primary school characteristics	N	N	N	Y

Note. The table shows DID estimates of the impact of MTP on secondary school enrolment. The Table follows structure and specifications of Table 2 and considers all students completing primary education l in untreated schools in Greater London as control group. See Section 5 for details. *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1.

Table B.3. Effects of MTP ignoring the pilot stage

	Dependent variable: enrolment indicator at secondary school			
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
		Panel A. State-funded school		
MTP	0.017	0.008	0.025**	0.024**
	(0.013)	(0.010)	(0.010)	(0.01)
		Panel B. MTP-promoted school		
MTP	0.553***	0.124***	0.013	0.012
	(0.036)	(0.022)	(0.013)	(0.012)
		Panel C. State-funded school in Camden		
MTP	0.593***	0.106***	0.012	0.011
	(0.046)	(0.019)	(0.09)	(0.009)
		Panel D. State-funded school in Camden's bordering LAs		
MTP	-0.497***	-0.089***	0.012	0.012
	(0.038)	(0.020)	(0.010)	(0.010)
Observations	180,284	180,284	180,284	180,284
Year FE	Y	Y	Y	Y
Census block (LSOA) FE	N	Y	Y	Y
Primary school FE	N	N	Y	Y
Individual and primary school characteristics	N	N	N	Y

Note. The table shows DID estimates of the impact of MTP on secondary school enrolment not considering the 2012 and 2013 waves, where the programme was at a pilot stage. Specifications and table structure follow the ones of Table 2. Here we drop school-year obseravations from the only primary institution where meetings were organised in 2012 and 2013. Standard errors are clustered on schools and reported in parentheses. *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1.

Appendix C Text analysis of MTP meeting minutes

We obtained minutes of the 2020 round of MTP meetings tracking the comments from secondary school panellists regarding secondary schools promoted at MTP meetings. The following secondary schools were promoted in the meetings held in 2020: Acland Burghley School (ABS), Arts and Media School Islington (AMSI), the Camden School for Girls (CSG), Hampstead School, Haverstock School, La Sainte Union Catholic School (LSU), Parliament Hill School (PHS), the UCL Academy (UCLA) and the William Ellis School (WES). Meeting minutes are organised by secondary school and report what was said regarding the school during MTP meetings.

We create a words dataset using the following procedure:

i. We extract all words except stop words' (e.g. articles, prepositions, pronouns, conjunctions) from each secondary school minutes' document;

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

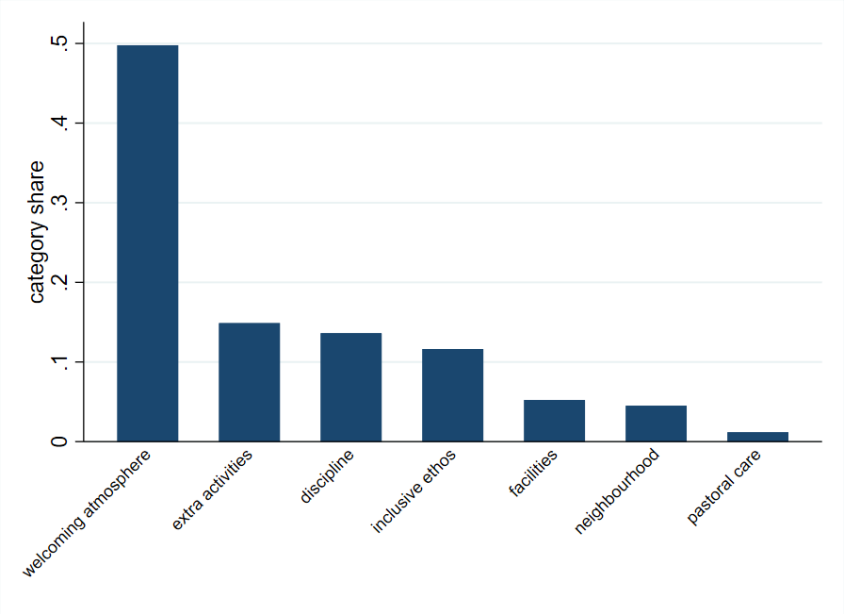
iii. We remove *observations* referring to the first row of a document, which is used to title the document. This leaves us with $2,769$ words (excluding numbers);

iv. We categorise the words following the categories of school attributes valued by parents as in Figure 2. At this stage, we drop from the dataset $1,130$ words that could not be categorised, such as neutral words (e.g. department, easy, form, email) and verbs. The complete words allocation, including uncategorised words, can be found at the following link: https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1eqlIurPsXvFCfvsztNrnll5wV9cnu_pyWfLSroMA6o0/edit?usp=sharing.

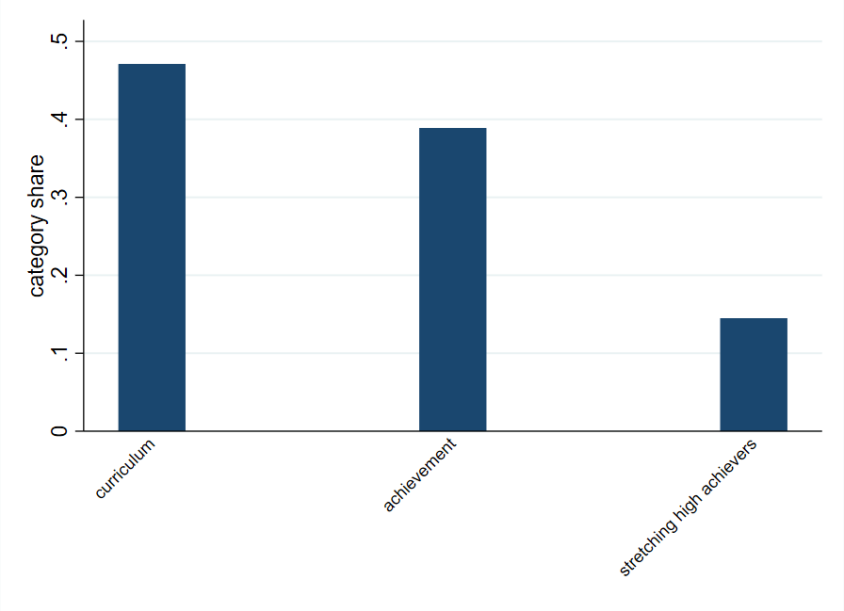
We compute shares in Figure 7 using categorised words only ($1,639$). We group subcategories of Figure 2 in three broad categories - 'atmosphere and environment' ($1,109$ words), 'performance' (414 words) and 'teachers' (116 words). Figure C.1 below documents by how much each subcategory contributes to the first two categories ('teachers' has one component only).

C.1. Subcategories of words mentioned during MTP meetings

Panel A. Atmosphere and environment



Panel B. Performance



Note. The figure shows how much each subcategory contributes to 'atmosphere and environment' (Panel A) and 'performance' (Panel B).

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