

A student-centered analysis of ethnic segregation in London's schools

December 2017

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Summary

In light of the rapid increase in the diversity of London's secondary school student population, as well as a growing concern about ethnic and religious segregation nationally, this report takes a new approach to investigating school segregation in the UK's capital. Instead of comparing the demographic profiles of schools to their local neighbourhoods, we investigate the experiences of individual students. More specifically, we look at the percentage of each student's peers who share their ethnic background, and compare this 'Shared Peer Ethnicity' (SPE) between students of different ethnic groups. This gives us a new granularity that contributes to a richer understanding of the ethnic dynamics within London's school system.

Our analysis found that despite widespread fears of increasing ethnic segregation, the results in London were broadly positive. Students on average attended a school where over 83% of their peers come from a different ethnic background. This suggests that being educated in London is an ethnically diverse experience for most young people. However, there remain areas of concern. White British students, on average, share their ethnicity with a far higher percentage of their peers than those from all other ethnic backgrounds – both before and after controlling for residential patterns. Students with Bangladeshi heritage are also comparatively less likely to experience an ethnically diverse education, with significant numbers attending schools where roughly 80% of students *share* their ethnic background.

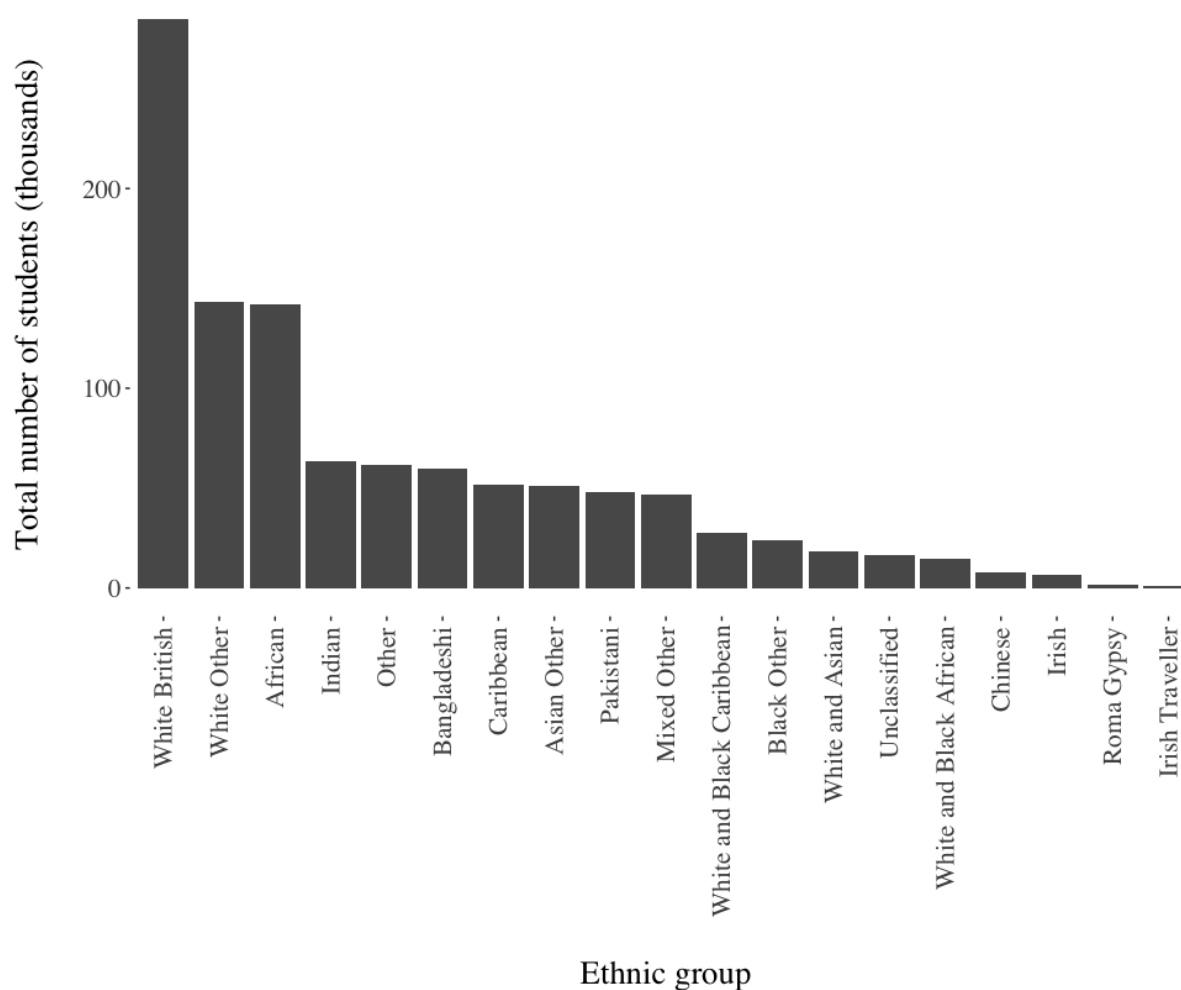
Background

The ethnic variety of London's school-aged population is striking, as is the speed at which it continues to diversify. The commonly-held perception that the ethnic make-up of London students is broadly binary, with a White British majority and smaller cohorts from a few other ethnic backgrounds, is out of date. Instead, we have seen an increasing plurality of different ethnic groups, none of which form even close to a majority. The city's largest ethnic group, White British, now only constitutes roughly one in four students in state-funded primary and secondary schools, down from approximately one in three only six years ago (See figure 1 below).

Moreover, both the plurality of different ethnic groups and the number of students self-categorizing as multi-ethnic is increasing. In 2011, there were only four ethnic groups that contained over 50,000 students. There are now seven, only six years later. Furthermore, the

'other' ethnic categories, traditionally used to record a small number of students who do not identify as part of one of the main ethnic groups, now collectively forms close to a third of the total make-up of London's student body (30.4%) – with 1 in 10 students now identifying as multi-ethnic.

Figure 1: The ethnic makeup of London's state-school school population (2017)



Importantly, these developments are likely to continue irrespective of future immigration policy. The higher birth rate of women born outside the UK (ONS, 2014a) coupled with the increased number of inter-ethnic families (ONS, 2014b) means that London, and its school-aged population in particular, will become more ethnically diverse.

This fundamental demographic change raises important policy issues around integration in schooling. Increasing numbers of politicians, think tanks and public figures have started to warn of the dangers of 'sleep-walking' into school segregation. Both Theresa May and David Cameron have in recent years expressed concern about ethnic segregation and the potential damage it can inflict on society (May, 2016; Cameron 2015). Amanda Spielman, head of Ofsted, has raised similar concerns (The Times, 2017). Relevant research is also starting to

be produced on a national level and the findings are worrying. In 2016 the Challenge, a UK think tank, found that as many as 25% of primary schools and 40% of secondary schools were ethnically divided in England and Wales (The Challenge, 2017). A string of reports from the Social Integration Commission have similarly warned that school segregation is an area of major concern as the nation diversifies (The Social Integration Commission, 2013; 2014; 2015).

Against this background, this report provides new empirical evidence on ethnic school segregation in London. It aims to contribute to the development of effective policies which are based on a more accurate and nuanced understanding of the composition of London students and the patterns of their school attendance by ethnicity. To date, much of the mainstream discussion has failed to take into account the breadth of the issue, instead focusing on monitoring a small number of faith schools as part of wider counter-terrorism initiatives. Whilst this is an important conversation to be had, it represents only a tiny proportion of the overall picture, with the experiences of the vast majority of students attending mainstream schools often overlooked.

London is a particularly interesting case study for this work, as previous quantitative research by Simon Burgess has shown that the city's ethnic composition is *the* central factor in explaining the high educational performance of London's schools. He found that "if London had the same ethnic composition as the rest of England, there would be no 'London Effect'". Subsequently, he argues that "the praise for [London's high performance] should be allocated to the pupils and parents of London for creating a successful multi-ethnic school system" (Burgess, 2014, p3). Given that the ethnic composition of schools is therefore important, not just for a harmonious society, but to students' educational outcomes, the topic warrants greater levels of attention.¹

Using a dataset from the Department for Education this report adopts a new approach to analysis, focusing on data that relates to individual students rather than whole schools. We use a novel measurement called Shared Peer Ethnicity (SPE). For each student in London we record the percentage of their school peers who share their ethnicity. For example, a White British student attending a school where 60% of the school were also White British would have a SPE of 60. Conversely, a student from an African background attending the same school would have a different SPE which would instead measure the percentage of the school who self-identified as African. By moving to student data, instead of school level figures, we provide a new scale of analysis which helps to produce a fuller, richer picture of students' experiences and the patterns of their school attendance.

Below is a summary of our main findings:

- Currently students attending state-funded primary and secondary schools in London have an ethnically diverse school experience. On average students share their ethnicity with only 17% of their peers, down from 19% in 2011.
- These figures, however, vary significantly between students with different ethnic backgrounds, and are not simply a product of residential patterns – though this does play a role.

¹ There is now an extensive body of research that shows that increasing contact between people from different backgrounds reduces intergroup prejudice and builds trust (See Everett, 2013; Allport, 1954; Pettigrew and Tropp, 2008).

- White British students on average share their ethnic identity with a far higher percentage of their school peers (46%) when compared to students from all other ethnic backgrounds. This remains consistent after adding controls for residential patterns – suggesting that White British students are the most segregated ethnic group in the London.
- For students from other ethnic backgrounds there remains significant variation in the predicted percentage of their peers who share their ethnicity at school. Students from Bangladeshi (38%), African (23%) and Indian (21%) backgrounds share their ethnicity with the highest percentage of their school peers, when compared to other minority ethnic groups.
- Chinese (2%), Irish Traveler (2%) and Roma Gypsy (1%) students share their ethnicity with the smallest percentage of their peers when compared to other minority ethnic groups.
- Students with Bangladeshi backgrounds follow a bimodal pattern of Shared Peer Ethnicity, meaning that Bangladeshi students either share their ethnic identity with a small percentage of their peers (centered around 4%) or with a very high percentage of their peers (centered around 80%).
- Only a small percentage of students attend schools in which their ethnic group make up an absolute majority (15.4%).
- Of those students, most come from a White British background (76%) with students from a Bangladeshi background the only other ethnic group with a sizable percentage (13.1%).
- 13 of the 18 ethnic groups surveyed have few to no students attending a school in which their ethnic group is in the absolute majority.
- White British students, on average, attend schools where they are most over represented in relation to the ethnic make-up of the other students in their local authority. On average, White British students attend schools where 10.5% more students are White British than can be accounted for by residential patterns.
- On average, students with Indian (10.2%), Bangladeshi (8.8%), African (7%) and Pakistani (5.4%) backgrounds also tend to attend schools where there is an over-representation of students from their ethnic background – albeit to a lesser extent.

The following sections outline the methodology used and provide a description of the results, before going on to discuss the implications of the findings and subsequent recommendations for policymakers. We hope that by offering empirical evidence we can help policymakers and education practitioners better understand the patterns of ethnicity in London schools. This not only helps ensure that schools are ready and able to serve their communities as the demographic profile of London changes, it also offers insights relevant to other parts of the country facing similar changes.

Methodology

Sample and population

This report uses a publicly available dataset from The Department for Education on the 2016/2017 pupil characteristics on schools in England and Wales (Department for Education, 2017). To form our sample, we narrowed our data set a number of times. Firstly, we excluded any school not located within the 33 local authorities (LAs) that form Greater London. Secondly, we removed any non-state funded schools. This was primarily because they are not required to release information about the ethnic makeup of their student population and they do not do so. Thirdly, we narrowed the sample to only primary and secondary schools in order to focus our study. Lastly, we excluded any school which was not part of the six main school types (Community school, Voluntary Aided, Academy Converter, Academy Sponsor Lead, Free School and Foundation School). This was in order to streamline our findings and resulted in a little over 1% of London's student population being removed from our sample and this had no significant impact on our findings. After these exclusions, we were left with a total sample size of 1,071,241 students attending 2,272 schools.

Approach to data analysis

This report differs from previous quantitative research in two respects. First, we changed the unit of analysis from schools to individual students. We transformed a school level database, where each row described the ethnic characterizations of a school (% White British, % African, % White Other etc.) to a far larger database where each row described an individual student. For each student we measured their Shared Peer Ethnicity (SPE), which recorded what percentage of students in their school is from the same ethnic background as them. This SPE score offers a new way of analyzing school segregation which is better placed to articulate students' experiences. Additionally, by looking at individual students we can aggregate the statistics on an ethnic group. This allowed us to compare the SPE of students with different ethnicities. Subsequently this shed light on which students have the most and least chance of being educated with young people from other ethnic groups. Given that school friendship groups often form people's social networks throughout their adult lives, this offered a predictive tool to identify which ethnic groups are most likely to be isolated from people of other ethnicities in the long term.

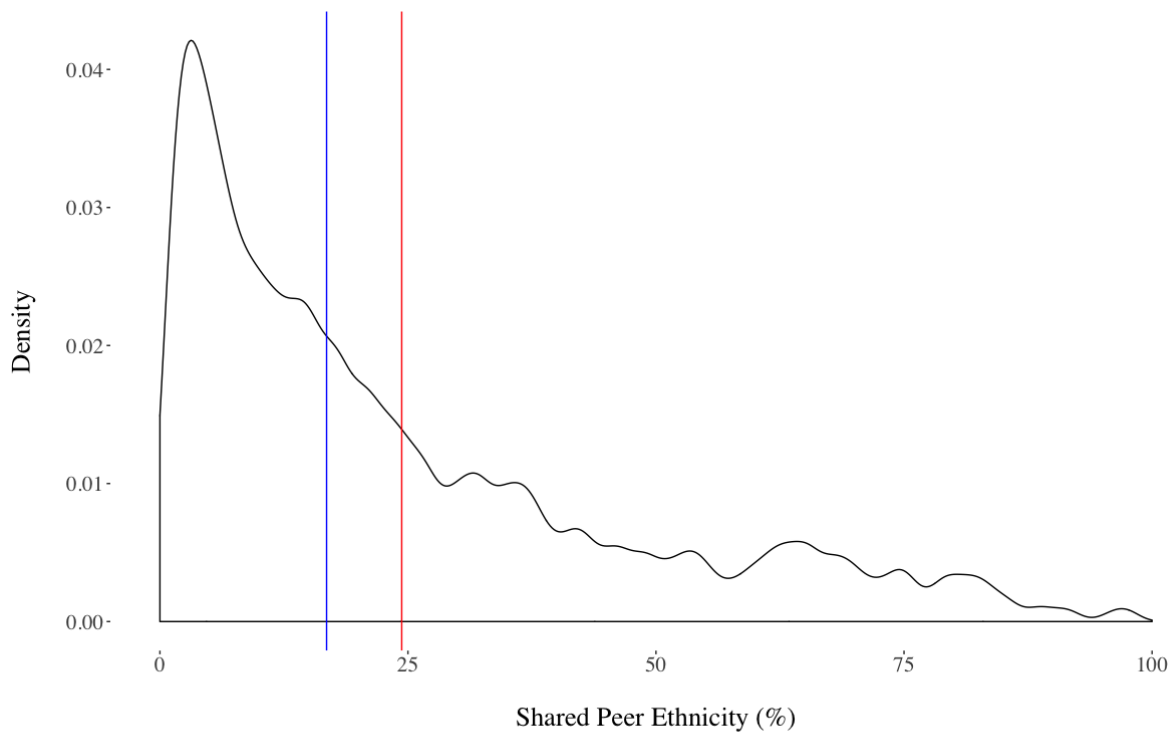
The second innovation we adopted was to focus initially on analyzing data without reference to residential patterns. This approach differs from most existing research which focuses on comparing the ethnic makeup of a school to the local neighbourhood. Whilst this is an important scale to work at, we felt that there was a gap for a city-wide analysis. This is particularly relevant to London, which often heralds its diversity as a central tenant of its identity.²

Results

² There is a long debate in the academic literature about the best way to control for residential segregation (Peach, 2009). There are likely to be concerns that LAs are too large an area to account for the sporadic geographical clustering of ethnic groups. Communities are rarely spread evenly across an LA and so the surrounding area of a school may be distinct from the make-up of the whole LA. Whilst this may be a reason to caution against an overzealous reading of the data, it does not fundamentally undermine the credibility of the models.

The overall picture shows that the majority of students in London attend a diverse school where their ethnic group is one of many. On average, students in our sample shared their ethnicity with 17% of their school peers, with over 84% of students attending schools in which their ethnic group was not in an absolute majority. When compared to data from 2011 we find that students in London are having an increasingly ethnically diverse experience, with students sharing their schools with a greater percentage of people from different ethnic backgrounds than they did six years ago. In 2011, students on average shared their ethnicity with 19% of their peers and 78% of student attended a school in which their ethnic group was not in an absolute majority.³ These statistics demonstrate a high level of ethnic integration in the London state school system.

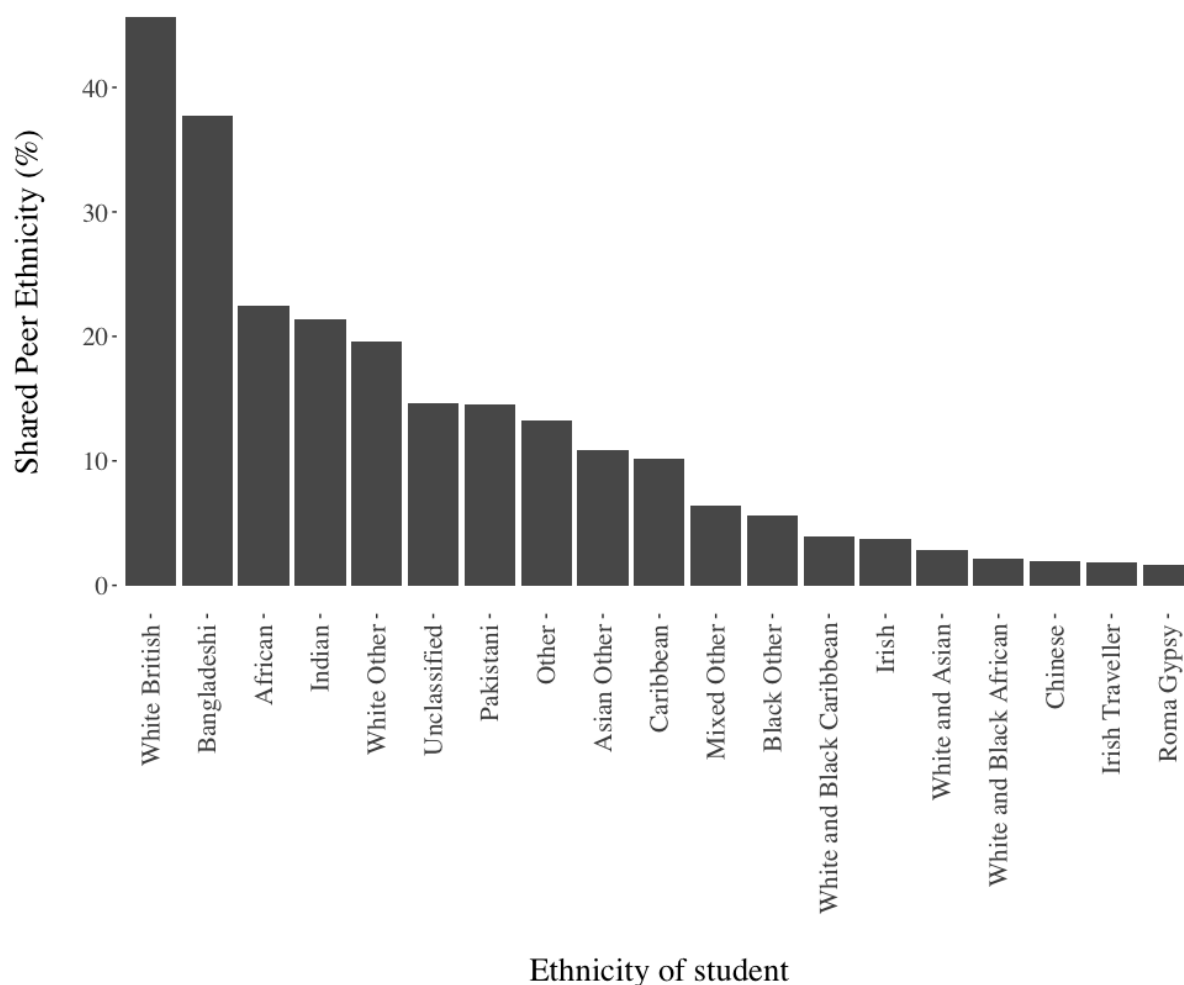
Figure 2: The distribution of Shared Peer Ethnicity for students in London state-funded primary and secondary schools in 2017



The red line shows the mean average (24%).
The blue line shows the median average (17%).

Figure 3: Average Shared Peer Ethnicity between students from different ethnic backgrounds

³ This may, however, primarily be the result of an overall increase in the number of students belonging to minority ethnic communities with further research needed to disaggregate the two trends.



Comparing Shared Peer Ethnicity between students of different ethnic backgrounds

However, there are some important variations in SPE between students of different ethnic backgrounds. White British students are likely to share their ethnicity with the highest percentage of their peers, on average attending schools where 46% of students are also White British. The next three ethnic groups with the largest average SPE are Bangladeshi (38%), African (23%) and Indian (21%). At the other end of the spectrum, students from Chinese (2%), Irish Traveler (2%) and Roma Gypsy (1%) backgrounds share their ethnicity with the smallest percentage of their peers.

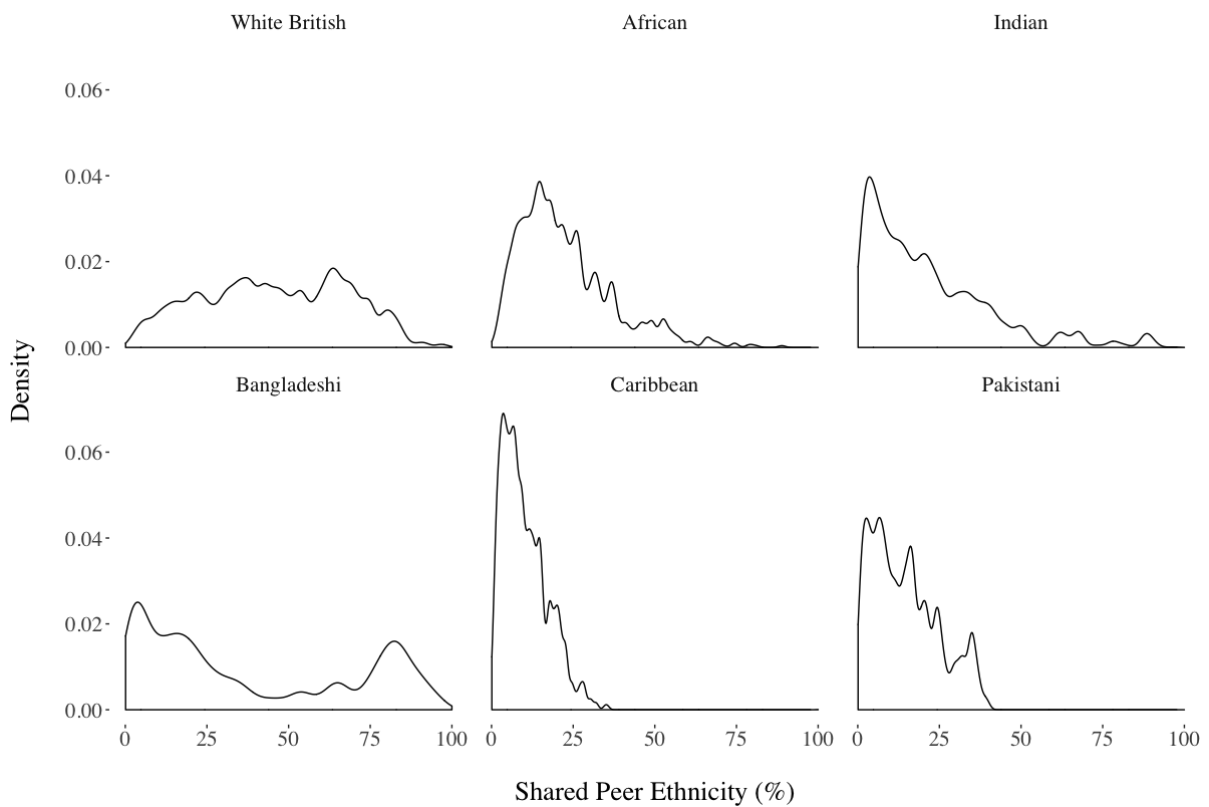
Patterns across ethnic groups

Single average figures do not, however, paint a full picture of Shared Peer Ethnicity, with the differing patterns across ethnic groups an important factor to consider. For White British students the pattern of SPE is centered around the average figure (46%), with roughly equal numbers of students going to school with a higher or lower percentage of fellow White British students. This makes the average figure useful as it represents an experience which is regularly observed.

Conversely, for students from Bangladeshi backgrounds the bimodal pattern of the data makes their group average figure (38%) far less insightful. In this instance, a relatively small percentage of students attend a school where they share their ethnicity with the average SPE for Bangladeshi students. Instead students either go to a school where roughly 4% of students are from Bangladeshi backgrounds, or they attend a school in which 80% of their school do. Consequently, the average of 38% is misleading, as it describes a midway point between these two peaks which is rarely observed in practice.

For all other ethnic groups, the pattern is positively skewed, meaning that most students attend a school where they share their ethnicity with a lower percentage of their peers than the average figure suggests. This is because a small number of students attending schools where they share their ethnicity with a far higher percentage of their peers unduly increases the group's overall average. In this case, it is often easiest just to look at the diagrams for a clear understanding of each group's SPE pattern. (See Appendix, Figure 7)

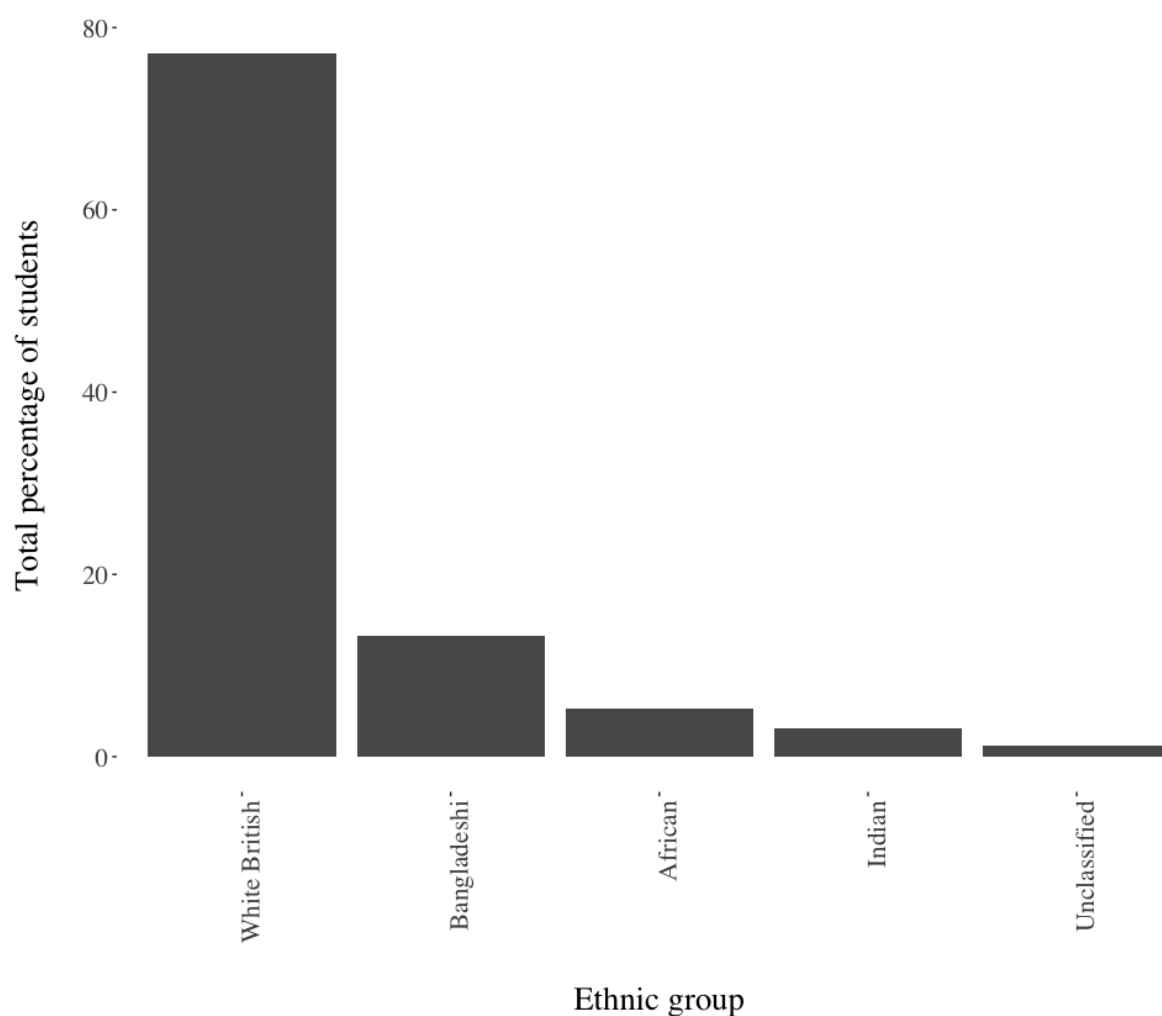
Figure 4: Pattern of Shared Peer Ethnicity across students from different ethnic backgrounds.



Absolute majority schools

Another key finding is that only a small percentage of students (15.4%) attend schools in which their ethnic group is in an absolute majority (SPE > 50). Of the students that do attend such schools, the vast majority are White British (76%) or, to a lesser extent, from a Bangladeshi background (13.1%). A small percentage are then either from African (5.2%) or Indian (3%) backgrounds. Outside these four identifiable ethnic groups there were no other groups which constituted more than 1% of the total number of students (see figure below). This means that only students from White British, Bangladeshi, African or Indian backgrounds attend schools in which their ethnic group is in the majority in any meaningful number.

Figure 5: The ethnic composition of students attending a state-funded London school in which their ethnic group is in an absolute majority, 2017.⁴



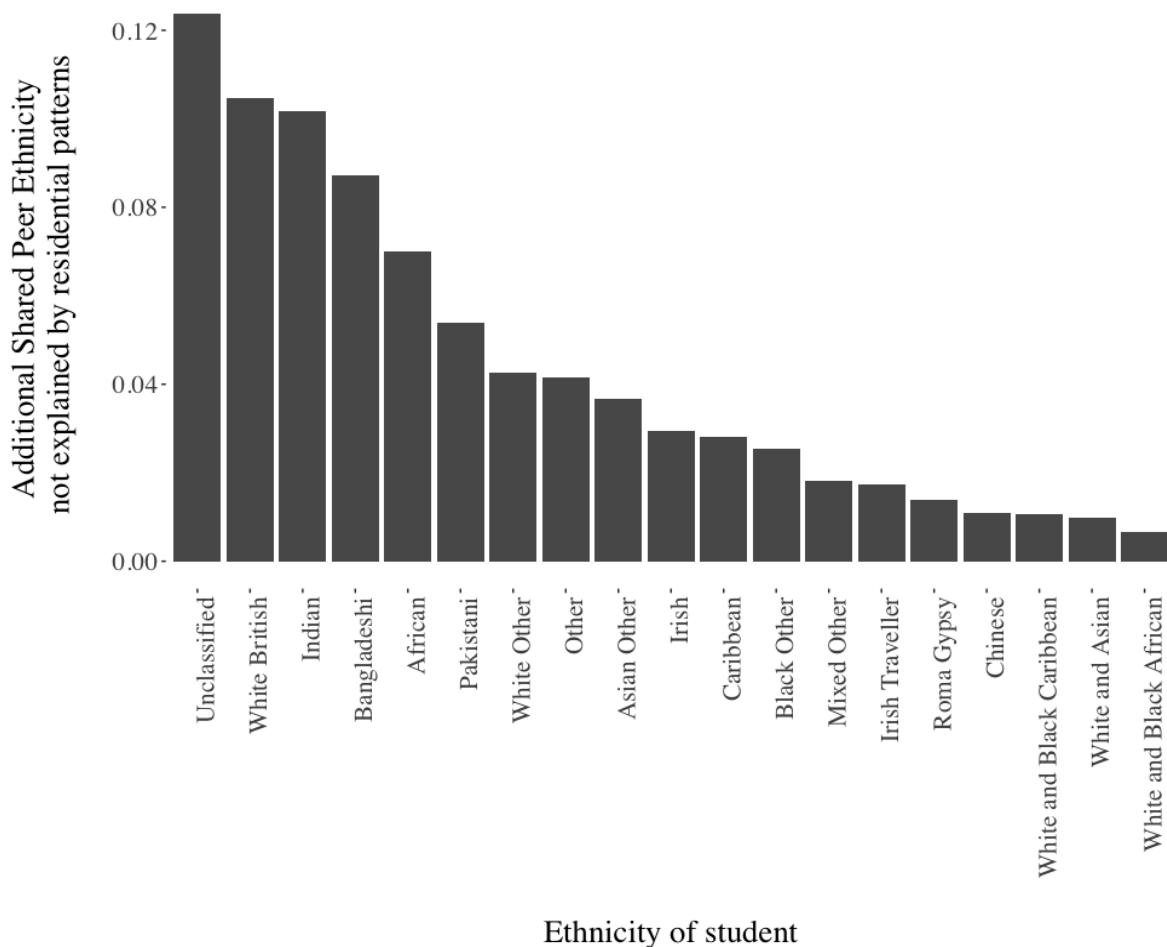
⁴ Five ethnic groups were excluded from this figure as they each constituted less than 1% of the students in a single ethnic majority schools (Caribbean, Mixed Other, White and Asian, Other, White Other).

Understanding the average figures and patterns of Shared Peer Ethnicity between different ethnic groups, as well as the breakdown of those attending single ethnic majority schools, provides a useful insight into patterns of ethnic segregation in London schools. Whilst this report goes on to disaggregate segregation at a residential and school level, there is utility in viewing the topic at different levels of granularity.

Controlling for residential patterns

It is often useful to try to distinguish between residential and school level factors in relation to school segregation. By doing so we gain a more nuanced understanding that helps design more targeted policy solutions. Figure 6 above compares the predicted ‘additional’ percentage of school peers who share a student’s ethnicity, above and beyond what we would expect given residential patterns. This describes the average level of over-representation in schools of different ethnic groups that cannot be account for by residential patterns. These figures can therefore be taken as a proxy measure for school-level factors in segregation.

Figure 6: Comparing the “additional” predicted percentage of Shared Peer Ethnicity for students after accounting for residential segregation



When looking at identifiable ethnic groups, White British students are on average predicted to attend schools in which their ethnicity is most over-represented.⁵ Here, our model predicts that White British students go to schools where, on average, they share their ethnic identity with 10.5% more students than is accounted for by residential patterns. This is a similar figure to Indian students who, on average, go to schools where they share their ethnicity with 10.2% more of their peers than would be expected. Bangladeshi (8.8%), African (7%) and Pakistani (5.4%) also on average, attend school in which they are an over-represented ethnic group, albeit to a lesser extent.

When exploring residential patterns, it is worth highlighting that in the following seven area (Havering, Tower Hamlets, Bexley, Richmond upon Thames, Kingston upon Thames, Bromley and Sutton) there is currently a single ethnic background that makes up a far higher proportion of school-aged students than those from other groups. This ranges from 45.2% of students being White British in Kingston Upon Thames to 65.8% of students being White British in Havering. Given that ethnic minorities are increasing moving out of areas in which they have previously clustered (Simpson, 2012), it is likely that the demographics of these areas will change. This will present new challenges and opportunities for the schools operating in these areas over the coming years.

Discussion of results

These findings have confirmed the super-diversity of London's school-aged population and have shown that most students are now in an ethnic minority in relation to their peers at school. Such demographic shifts mean that students from minority ethnic groups are now the rule, with policymakers no longer able to assume a default majority ethnicity. The fact that most students attend schools with young people from a plurality of different ethnic backgrounds is indicative of the relative success that London has enjoyed in building an integrated school system.

There are however pockets of concern which need to be addressed. White British students are comparatively isolated from those of other ethnic backgrounds. This is potentially problematic, both for White British students and London as a whole. There is now an extensive body of research that shows the importance of contact in the "reduction of prejudice and promotion of more positive intergroup attitudes" (Everett, 2013; see also Allport, 1954; Pettigrew and Tropp, 2008). Having the largest ethnic group in London separated from those of other backgrounds could well undermine long-term efforts at creating harmonious inter-ethnic communities. This is particularly salient given the recent 20% rise in religious and racist hate crimes in London over the last year (The Independent, 2017). It is also worth noting that White British students could well be putting themselves at an educational disadvantage. Given the strong academic performance of non-White British students (Strand, 2012), by attending schools with fewer students from minority ethnic

⁵ We find that students with an "unclassified" ethnic background share their identity with the largest percentage of their school peers. This represents students who did not fill out their ethnic background in school questionnaires, or return their questionnaires at all. It is therefore hard to know what the background of these students is. Consequently, we ignore this data for the purposes of our analysis.

backgrounds, White British students are likely to miss the chance to learn alongside higher achieving peers.

The concentration of students from Bangladeshi backgrounds in a small number of schools is also something which deserves further examination. Whilst much of this pattern relates to the residential clustering of Bangladeshi families in Tower Hamlets, having schools where 80% of students come from a single ethnic group is something of an anomaly and warrants further scrutiny in a city with such high levels of ethnic diversity.

Recommendations

To protect and further develop a diverse and inclusive school system this report puts forward some recommendations. Firstly, we outline several areas of school policy which are likely to be affected by the trends found in this report and call for further research to develop effective policy. Secondly, we highlight several LAs who in the coming years will face specific challenges and opportunities which they need to be ready to respond to. Lastly, we argue future quantitative research is needed to investigate patterns of ethnicity in other UK cities to provide localised findings that specifically support policymakers and educational practitioners working in such areas. This forms part of a larger need for government agencies to ensure efficient data collection and dissemination on ethnicity to those working in schools.

The demographic trends charted in this report are likely to have long-term implications for a wide range of educational areas. These include teacher recruitment and demographic make-up (e.g. increasing the hiring and retention of teachers from a wide range of minority ethnic backgrounds); English language provision; inclusive catchment areas; curriculum development and family engagement (e.g. translation services at parents' evenings). Across all these areas, and others, policymakers will need to think about how to meet the needs of super-diverse student populations. More research is needed to help inform best practices in London, and bodies such as City Hall, Ofsted, the Greater London Authority and the Department for Education should ensure that this work is being produced. Crucially, any research undertaken also needs to be made publicly available and effectively disseminated to those working in schools.

Secondly, there are two groups of LAs which face specific challenges and opportunities in relation to demographic changes. Firstly, there are several local authorities (Havering, Tower Hamlets, Bexley, Richmond upon Thames, Kingston upon Thames, Bromley and Sutton) who are likely to move from having a single ethnic group that constitutes a large percentage of the overall student population, to one where there are a number of different ethnic groups. For most, this new ethnic diversity will be a relatively novel experience. Schools must therefore be responsive to changes during this transition period in order to ensure that the increased ethnic diversity does not correspond to an increase in school segregation.

The second group relates to LAs operating at the other end of the spectrum. Areas like Newham, Brent and Harrow now have student populations where no ethnic group makes up more than 21% of the overall student population. Whilst these LAs have experience of educating student from a variety of different ethnic backgrounds, the extent of the diversity is new. In these LAs there is now such a plurality of small groups that meeting the needs of their local communities is likely to prove logistically challenging.

Lastly, there is a need for these discussions to extend outside London to other UK cities who are experiencing similar demographic changes. To date most quantitative research has been conducted at a national level - with most city level analysis centered on London. This has left other cities with large populations of minority ethnic students with limited localized quantitative findings to guide policy debates. In particular, Birmingham, Manchester, Bradford, Nottingham and Leicester could all benefit from more targeted data analysis that examines the specific trends at a city level.

As part of this push, the Department for Education, Office of National Statistics and/or Ofsted need to ensure up-to-date and accurate data that monitors the demographic make-up of students. Given the pace of change in cities like London, such data will need to be collected, analysed and disseminated to schools quickly to ensure that educational professionals can respond to the needs of their local communities. Whilst third party research organisations can provide commentary and analysis on wider systemic trends, government agencies must see the collection and dissemination of this more granular data analysis as part of their responsibility.

Conclusion

The ethnic composition of London's school-aged population is now super-diverse, both in terms of the large percentage of non-White British students, as well as the number of ethnic groups with sizable student populations. Given such diversity, it is notable that, on average, students in London share their school with a high percentage of students belonging to other ethnic backgrounds. This shows that for most students, being educated in London is an ethnically and culturally diverse experience, a scenario which is not only beneficial for inter-ethnic relations (Everett, 2013) but is also associated with better educational outcomes (Burgess, 2014, p3). There however remain pockets of concern, particularly in relation to students of White British and Bangladeshi heritage, who remain comparatively isolated. As London, and the UK as a whole, continues to diversify, it becomes increasingly important to engage with issues of school segregation before they take hold. We hope that the evidence contained in this report, along with the recommendations, can help provide an empirical grounding for such work.

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Appendix

Figure 6: Regression output

	Dependent variable	
	Predicted Shared Ethnicity	
	Model 1	Model 2
African	-0.231 ^{***} (0.001)	-0.034 ^{***} (0.0004)
Asian Other	-0.348 ^{***} (0.001)	-0.067 ^{***} (0.001)
Bangladeshi	-0.078 ^{***} (0.001)	-0.016 ^{***} (0.001)
Black Other	-0.400 ^{***} (0.001)	-0.079 ^{***} (0.001)
Caribbean	-0.354 ^{***} (0.001)	-0.076 ^{***} (0.001)
Chinese	-0.436 ^{***} (0.002)	-0.093 ^{***} (0.001)
Gypsy Roma	-0.440 ^{***} (0.004)	-0.090 ^{***} (0.003)
Indian	-0.243 ^{***} (0.001)	-0.002 ^{***} (0.001)
Irish	-0.419 ^{***} (0.002)	-0.074 ^{***} (0.002)
Irish Traveller	-0.437 ^{***}	-0.086 ^{***}

	(0.005)	(0.004)
Mixed Other	-0.392 ^{***}	-0.086 ^{***}
	(0.001)	(0.001)
Mixed White and African	-0.435 ^{***}	-0.097 ^{***}
	(0.001)	(0.001)
Mixed White and Caribbean	-0.417 ^{***}	-0.093 ^{***}
	(0.001)	(0.001)
Other	-0.324 ^{***}	-0.062 ^{***}
	(0.001)	(0.001)
Pakistani	-0.311 ^{***}	-0.050 ^{***}
	(0.001)	(0.001)
Mixed White and Asian	-0.428 ^{***}	-0.094 ^{***}
	(0.001)	(0.001)
White Other	-0.261 ^{***}	-0.060 ^{***}
	(0.001)	(0.0004)
Ethnicity shared in LA		0.954 ^{***}
		(0.001)
Constant	0.456 ^{***}	0.104 ^{***}
	(0.0003)	(0.0004)
Observations	1,071,241	1,071,241
R ²	0.436	0.705
Adjusted R ²	0.436	0.704
Residual Std. Error	0.169 (df = 1071222)	0.122 (df = 1071221)



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