

The Pupil Premium and Policy Transfer in English Standalone and System Leader Multi-Academy Trust Academies

Basma B. Yaghi

*Department of Social Policy, London School of Economics and Political Science,
London, United Kingdom*

b.b.yaghi@lse.ac.uk

Basma B. Yaghi is a Research Assistant at the Department of Social Policy, London School of Economics and Political Science.

<https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5399-2996>

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As England attempts to close educational attainment gaps faced by socioeconomically disadvantaged children using Pupil Premium funding, no attention is given to how different types of academies do so, nor to policy transfer's role in informing policies for disadvantaged pupils. Employing a qualitative comparative case study methodology with semi-structured interviews and documentary analysis, this research compares five primary standalone academies with five system leader multi-academy trust academies. It finds all academies support disadvantaged children with academic, pastoral and extracurricular provision. This is justified by voluntary and coercive policy transfer extending across space and time, in addition to evidence-based policies and school-specific needs prioritised to varying degrees across academy types. Overall, system leader multi-academy trust academies' structure and composition facilitate policy transfer through horizontal and vertical spread of successful practices compared to standalone academies.

Keywords: academies; disadvantage; Pupil Premium; policy transfer; multi-academy trust; standalone academy.

Introduction

Current trends suggest 50 years could pass before the educational attainment gap between disadvantaged and non-disadvantaged children in England closes by the time they finish secondary school (Andrews, Robinson, and Hutchinson 2017). The challenge of alleviating educational socio-economic inequalities is more pertinent given the inequalities being perpetuated by COVID-19 (Education Endowment Foundation 2020). The government's flagship policy for tackling this disadvantage gap since 2011 has been the Pupil Premium (PP), a funding stream for schools to use at their discretion to enhance disadvantaged pupils' attainment (DfE 2020a). Disadvantage is measured by Free School Meal (FSM) eligibility, and PP funding amounts to £1,345 for primary-

aged pupils, and £955 for secondary-aged pupils who have been eligible for FSM in the last six years (ibid.). This research will illustrate schools' PP policies and the reasons underpinning them. This is important in order to reveal how public expenditure for some of society's most disadvantaged children is utilised, in an area as life-changing as their educational outcomes.

However, research has not yet considered the PP policy while taking into account a widescale transformation in English education policy: the growth of academisation. Academies are publicly funded schools owned by an independent trust, which range from multi-academy trust (MAT) academies to standalone academies (West and Wolfe 2019). MATs run multiple academies under a single contract, and single-academy trusts run one standalone academy (ibid.). Academies are not subject to the same education legislation as local authority (LA) maintained schools and thus have greater autonomy (Wolfe 2011). Among MATs, system leader MATs are the largest, with over 30 academies nationwide (Hillary et al. 2017). Consequently, the government expects them to exert greater influence in the academy system by widely disseminating successful practices (DfE 2016). These MATs also have higher proportions of PP children than the national average (Andrews 2017). The intersection between their intended 'role model' status to other academies and their high levels of disadvantaged pupils makes it informative to compare their academies' PP policies and justifications of them with standalone academies, which are juxtaposing school types. This study will also shed light on policy transfer. Policy transfer is especially prominent now as COVID-19 has substantiated the importance of learning from similar units' experiences (Weible et al. 2020). Understanding the processes of learning lessons about policies from the past, other schools and having policies imposed from a MAT will engage with the debate on how amenable these school structures are to transferring policies.

This research asks: *How do primary standalone academies and multi-academy trust academies in a system leader trust use and justify their usage of the Pupil Premium, and what role does policy transfer play in this?* This should uncover insights about how academy-specific characteristics influence PP policies, the reasoning behind them and engagement in policy transfer. While the expansion of ‘independent’ schools including academies is a global trend, England is a significant context to study academies as they have propelled structural change contributing to radically reforming the governance of its education system (Salokangas and Ainscow 2018). Indeed, the government has a vision for every school to become an academy (DfE 2021a). Also, primary schools are studied because investment in primary compared to secondary education plays a greater role in addressing educational disadvantage, with higher returns (Gorard and See 2013).

This paper is structured as follows. The literature review covers research on England’s policies for disadvantaged pupils, focusing on the PP; research about academies; and examines policy transfer as this study’s conceptual framework. The empirical and conceptual gaps this research seeks to close are explained. Next, I elucidate this research’s methodology as a qualitative homologous comparative case study method entailing both horizontal and vertical comparisons, utilising semi-structured interviews and documentary analysis, and its limitations. Subsequently, I describe the results derived from thematic analysis by categorising the findings under the overarching themes of ‘policies’, ‘policy justifications’, and presenting policy comparisons, albeit briefly describing policies and concentrating on policy justifications as this was the most insightful and includes policy transfer. Then the discussion interprets the findings in relation to the research question and literature. Finally, the conclusion highlights the research’s contributions, implications and suggestions for

further research.

Literature Review

Policies for Disadvantaged Children

The English government has adopted a range of policies to tackle educational disadvantage prior to the introduction of the PP (West 2009). Starting from the late 1960s, Educational Priority Areas were established, where schools with high proportions of disadvantaged children were given additional financial resources for investment in teacher training and school building projects (Smith 1987). Interest in area-based policies grew during the 1997-2010 Labour government, and interventions included Education Action Zones (Halpin et al. 2008), the Excellence in Cities programme (Kendall et al. 2005) and Pupil Learning Credits scheme (Braun et al. 2005). These were managed by public-private partnerships and entailed funding streams to compensate for disadvantage (Power 2008), either targeting deprived LAs or schools and each having specific interventions ee.g., Excellence in Cities financed ‘learning mentors’ for pupils (Kendall et al. 2005). A policy with a longer legacy due to its later restructuring was sponsored, then called ‘city’ academies, which replaced failing schools in deprived inner-city areas and attempted to enhance performance standards (DfEE 2000).

The PP, introduced in 2011, is unique as it is an individual-based policy built on the idea of a positively discriminating voucher (Le Grand 1989) attaching to disadvantaged children (Chowdry, Greaves, and Sibieta 2010). Thus far, schools with high proportions of disadvantaged children have been more successful in using it

compared to other schools, almost closing attainment gaps (Hutchinson and Dunford 2016). The other main policy regarding disadvantage, i.e. Opportunity Areas, is more limited in scope and scale. It grants 12 disadvantaged areas access to a teaching and learning innovation fund and chances to formulate partnerships between schools and local organisations (DfE 2017). Its estimated yearly investment of £64 million (DfE 2019b) is miniscule compared to the £2.41 billion PP expenditure covering 1.8 million children during 2019-2020 (Foster and Long 2020). Also recently introduced are the COVID-19 catch-up premium, which includes a £350 million National Tutoring Programme targeting disadvantaged children (DfE 2020b), and the £302 million Recovery Fund which builds on the Pupil Premium (DfE 2021b). However, these are only one-off funds. Thus the PP policy is the widest-reaching and considered the government's primary policy to tackle educational disadvantage, making it crucial to analyse when studying England's policies for disadvantaged children.

To turn to academic research, most studies on the PP policy describe how it is used regarding the support provided through it. Schools utilise a multidimensional range of provision which is mainly classified into academic provision through teaching and learning interventions, pastoral provision for psychological and familial support, and extra-curricular provision for enrichment (Ofsted 2012; Carpenter et al. 2013; Ofsted 2013; Macleod et al. 2015; Abbott et al. 2015; Abbott et al. 2016; Dann 2016; Shain 2016; Barrett 2018). Academic PP provision is mixed and most commonly comprises extra staff such as teaching assistants and greater in- and out-of-classroom support, including small group teaching and individualised tutoring, and staff training. Additionally, the aforementioned studies show how pastoral support is offered to tackle barriers to learning produced by issues in the children's lives. This encompasses hiring specialists including educational psychologists and family welfare officers for social,

emotional and behavioural support, and financing therapeutic interventions for children and their families. Moreover, extra-curricular provision is supplied to broaden their life experiences, including after-school clubs and trips, and skills development through student leadership initiatives.

Nonetheless, the most popular provision was academic, with less PP funding allocated to pastoral and extracurricular provision compared to this. This is because academic provision is both perceived by schools and evidenced to be the most effective in targeting PP children's lower achievement (Education Endowment Foundation 2019). This emphasis is also driven by government accountability mechanisms regarding PP usage (Foster and Long 2018). as schools perceive it as simpler to measure academic interventions' success in closing attainment gaps (Craske 2018).

Moreover, research has analysed the justifications underlying PP provision, which is crucial in order to understand which sources and processes schools draw upon to underpin their policies. The government is eager for schools to utilise research evidence when choosing their PP policies, recommending evidence usage from their 'what works' centre, the Education Endowment Foundation (EEF) (DfE 2019a). Indeed, 65% of schools claim academic research, including the EEF's, informs their PP provision (Carpenter et al. 2013; National Audit Office 2015), with academic provision particularly likely to be evidence-based (Macleod et al. 2015). Furthermore, schools seek other schools' practices to underpin their PP provision, whereby 74% of primary schools note this as a justification (Carpenter et al. 2013). This concurs with Craske's (2018) qualitative study indicating one school visits Ofsted-rated Outstanding schools to develop their PP policies. However, schools' prior experiences of what works may be the most prevalent reasoning, as 98% of schools cite their internal monitoring and

evaluation as informing PP provision (Carpenter et al. 2013). Indeed, Macleod et al. (2015) find schools with greater success in their PP usage had adjusted interventions or developed novel ones based on their past experiences compared to those that merely copied prescribed approaches. This is connected with another factor informing PP policies, which is tailoring provision to school-specific needs. Outstanding schools emphasise pupils' unique needs and ensure PP provision reinforces inclusive school values (Abbott, Middlewood, and Robinson 2015), with this reasoning being adopted by schools which are effective in using the PP (Macleod et al. 2015).

PP research has also studied who schools target in practice, as funds for individual students may not be spent for the purpose intended (Abbott, Middlewood, and Robinson 2015). Especially since some schools had initially lost greater funding in abolished grants than they had gained in PP funding, they did not always target all eligible pupils (Lupton and Thomson 2015). Instead, they often target PP students unlikely to satisfy minimum government-defined performance targets (National Audit Office 2015; Barrett 2018). However, 94% of schools target support towards disadvantaged pupils relative to 57% before the PP's introduction (National Audit Office 2015), demonstrating its impact.

Yet a major empirical research gap concerns how policies for disadvantaged children and their justifications generally, and the PP specifically, differs, if at all, depending on the types of differently governed schools. Past literature has examined PP usage in low-achievement schools (Carpenter et al. 2013) and Ofsted-rated Outstanding schools (Abbott, Middlewood, and Robinson 2015), and comparative research has explored variations in its usage between schools with varying proportions of FSM pupils (Barrett 2018); special educational needs pupils, and urban versus rural schools

(Carpenter et al. 2013). However, we have no knowledge on whether different types of academies have different PP policies and reasoning for them. This is despite how research suggests school-specific factors strongly influence policies (Braun et al. 2011; Macleod et al. 2015), and different types of academies have important characteristics specific to them.

Academies

‘Different types’ of academies should be explained. These can be sponsored or converter academies, or free schools. Sponsored academies comprise previously underperforming schools (DfEE 2000), and converter academies are schools which, in 2010, could become academies if they were ‘Outstanding’ (DfE 2010), or in 2011, ‘performing well’ (West and Bailey 2013). Finally, newly established schools must be academies and are called ‘free schools’ (ibid.). However, this research will compare academies regarding whether they are MAT or standalone academies. To elaborate, academies’ autonomy must be considered, as this was a key goal of the 2010 academies programme, which spread academies rather than LA maintained schools (DfE 2010). Autonomy in this context means academies have greater freedom than maintained schools in many aspects; retaining responsibility for their admissions, not having to follow the national curriculum, nor employ qualified teachers (DfE 2014). However, although MATs possess this autonomy, most academies run by MATs do not. This is because they do not exist as independent legal entities to exercise such freedom; rather, they are merely the local site through which the MAT provides the education obligated by the central contract (West and Wolfe 2019).

The government's preferred structure is MATs, as they permit 'the system's best leaders to run more than one school' (DfE 2016, 57). The Secretary of State for Education has said it is 'no longer viable for schools to be single entities' (DfE 2021c), referring to standalone academies. He has announced his intention of making all schools part of a MAT, as MATs are a 'strong family of schools' (Williamson 2021) whereby school-led improvement and collaboration is 'core to the role of MATs' (DfE 2016, 18). Teaching School Alliances also exist in the government's model of system leadership and are run by excellent schools, but they only train schools and develop school-to-school collaboration rather than own schools (Gov 2020c). Among MATs, system leader MATs are favoured to smaller MATs i.e. national, established, and starter MATs due to their size (Hillary et al. 2017). Therefore, MAT academies', and specifically system leader MAT academies' advancement as the ideal school type and this possible impact on PP provision magnifies the significance of studying them and comparing them with standalone academies, which have greater autonomy (West and Wolfe 2019). If they use PP funding in heterogeneous ways to standalone academies, or employ different reasoning underpinning this, this may have implications for different academies' capabilities to support disadvantaged pupils. However, the research merging academies and disadvantaged children has examined associations between academies and FSM pupil intake (Gorard 2014; Eyles et al. 2016) and performance (ibid.; Hutchings and Francis 2018), neglecting academies' policies for disadvantaged children.

The literature which has investigated MAT and standalone academies' policies generally and what underpins them suggests they operate differently due to their different structures. Ofsted (2019) shows MATs generally have MAT-wide teaching, learning and curriculum policies, delegating areas such as behaviour policies to

academies. This coincides with Menzies' et al. (2018) finding large variation in the extent to which policy areas were devolved to academies or retained at the MAT. Larger MATs in particular have more centralised, standardised approaches, with schools experiencing less decision-making power and autonomy (Salokangas and Chapman 2014; Greany and Higham 2018; Ofsted 2019). Conversely, standalone academies highly value having freedom over their policies (Cirin 2017). Yet MATs' centralisation is related to how MATs collate data using shared back-office support, whereas standalone academies lack the capacity for this (Hill et al. 2012). For instance, one large nationally organised MAT has a core data system which compares attainment between PP and non-PP students, evaluating this within and across academies (Ehren and Godfrey 2017). Furthermore, many academies join MATs in order to network with other schools (Salokangas and Chapman 2014) and belong to a 'family of schools' with aligning 'missions', with other MAT academies and central staff as resources to help attain these (Greany 2018; Keddie 2019; Ofsted 2019). Hence this study will reveal if and how the prevalent and systematic features of these different types of academies extend to informing the reasoning behind policies for disadvantaged children.

Conceptual Framework: Policy Transfer

Since similar policy problems often exist and persist across space and time, policy transfer to address these problems is common (Rose 1991) and therefore granted much academic attention. Policy transfer is defined in Dolowitz and Marsh's (1996, 344) seminal paper as a process where knowledge of policies, institutions or administrative arrangements in one place or time is utilised in developing policies, institutions or administrative arrangements in another place or time. Conceptually, policy transfer asks

who is involved in transfer, why and how (Marsh and Sharman 2009), focusing on the processes through which transfer occurs (Dolowitz and Marsh 2000). It also acknowledges that differences in policy environments can influence policies' political feasibility and implementation and hence the likelihood and suitability of policy transfer (Mossberger and Wolman 2003). If the heterogeneity in socio-economic and political contexts between transferring and borrowing entities is given inadequate attention, inappropriate transfer may occur (Dolowitz and Marsh 2000). Alternatively, insufficient or inaccurate information about the policy may generate uninformed transfer (Wolman 1992). Hence varying factors are considered during the policy transfer process.

Since policy transfer emphasises proactive knowledge utilisation preceding transfer, it may be confused with policy learning. Bennett and Howlett (1992) comprehensively review policy learning's various conceptualisations, which differ regarding what is learned, but policy transfer mainly overlaps with policy learning conceived as 'lesson-drawing' (Rose 1991, 1993). This is where lessons i.e. action-oriented conclusions about policies learned from national history and different jurisdictions' experiences are applied to one's own political system (ibid). Learning lessons about programmes and instruments across spatial and temporal dimensions can then promote the transfer of policies.

Yet contrary to critiques of policy transfer which claim it may be equivalent to lesson-drawing (Dussauge-Laguna 2012), or cannot be disentangled from other forms of policymaking (James and Lodge 2003), policy transfer intersects with but also extends beyond policy learning. Dolowitz and Marsh (1996, 2000) explain lesson-drawing only concurs with *voluntary* policy transfer, which emerges from actors' free choices to learn and transfer lessons due to dissatisfaction with current policies. This transfer can occur

to varying degrees, including copying, involving direct and full transfer; emulation, i.e. transferring ideas underlying a policy; combinations, comprising a hybrid of different policies, and inspiration, where policies are stimulated by policies in other jurisdictions, but final outcomes are not extracted from original models (Dolowitz and Marsh 2000). These largely coincide with Rose's (1993) types of programme change resulting from lesson-drawing. Yet policy transfer has added conceptual value compared to policy learning since it also entails the category of *coercive* policy transfer (Dolowitz and Marsh 1996).

Coercive policy transfer is where one government or supra-national institution pushes or obliges another government to introduce a policy. This can be direct coercive policy transfer, where this policy is forced or imposed on a country, but is more frequently indirect coercive policy transfer, where policymakers may be indirectly pushed towards a policy (Dolowitz and Marsh 1996, 2000). This may be driven by political reasons such as actors viewing their country as possessing a poor image due to lagging behind their competitors or neighbours, or the rise of an international consensus on a policy area (Bennett 1991). Nevertheless, there is no rigid distinction between voluntary and coercive policy transfer (Dolowitz and Marsh 2000). For instance, transfer which is optional but deemed by policymakers as essential for international acceptance or negotiated under constraint lies between voluntary and coercive transfer (Hoberg 1991). This continuum of voluntary and coercive transfer present in policy transfer grants analytical leverage, as it helps capture nuances in transfer processes (Perry and Tor 2008).

Situating the concept of policy transfer within education policy highlights its prominence, as countries increasingly transfer policies from high-performing education

systems and research examines this (Crossley 2014). However, a gap exists regarding the units engaging in education policy transfer. Similar to the mainstream transfer literature (Dolowitz and Marsh 2012), educational transfer research focuses on cross-national transfer, which is at the heart of comparative education enquiry (Phillips 2015). Hence policy transfer has been applied to education regarding, for instance, transferring curriculum and assessment policies between Hong Kong and Britain (Forestier and Crossley 2015), and university tuition policies from Australia to New Zealand (Chapman and Greenaway 2006). While some research covers non-state units, such as transfer from multilateral (Jules and Bouhlila 2018) and non-governmental organisations (Rappleye 2012) and universities (Bache and Taylor 2003), transfer between schools is under-researched. Indeed, Evans and Davies (1999) argue there is a deficit of research on inter-organisational transfer processes. Thus this study will illuminate inter-organisational policy transfer in academies and a MAT, which are important contexts of educational practice (Simkins 2015).

Furthermore, applying policy transfer to this study's empirical issues of interest is relevant, given the prevalence of cooperation between academies and the subsequent potential to uncover insights about policy transfer in these contexts. Cirin (2017) reveals 96% of MATs report their structure has facilitated collaboration, while 87% of (Ofsted-rated 'Good' or 'Outstanding') standalone academies state they collaborate with other schools. This is corroborated by Greany (2018) and Ofsted (2019) demonstrating that MATs prioritise collaboration amongst their schools, with senior leader peers and MAT central staff sharing examples of good practice. However, some academies feel they lack commonality with other academies in their MAT, seeking local schools' successful practice (ibid; Salokangas and Chapman 2014). This mirrors how Greany and Higham (2018) find 67% of primary schools claim their school's strongest partnership was a

‘local cluster’, rather than MAT. Relatedly, while some MAT academies are committed to collaborating with those beyond their MAT, many are inward-looking and only concerned about transferring policies within the MAT (Hill et al. 2012; Kaukoa and Salokangas 2015). Exploring transfer processes and whether these only involve the MAT’s academies suggests the significance of studying system leader MAT academies’ policy transfer and comparing them with standalone academies (on which research is more limited). This can then uncover whether such MATs are truly means of transferring successful policies across education as the government anticipates (DfE 2016).

Considering academies’ control over their policies is also relevant to studying policy transfer in schools. Ofsted argues MATs tend to standardise policies in some areas, and Salokangas and Chapman’s (2014) and Menzies’ et al. (2018) note these are frequently policies crucial for schools’ functioning, including school improvement and curriculum policies. These studies also emphasise MAT’s’ heterogeneity, where some academies have bottom-up approaches in drawing policies from one another, while other MATs impose top-down consistency. Hence overall, most MATs retain control over support functions, but draw on school-to-school support to augment this (Greany 2018). Thus by employing coercive policy transfer conceptually, this study will compare its role in justifying PP policies and reveal whether such control differs across standalone and MAT academies.

Relatedly, no research has investigated PP policy transfer. Yet as noted in the above review of PP research, Carpenter et al. (2013) and Craske (2018) argue schools seek evidence from other schools, and the former and Macleod et al. (2015) also affirm how learning from past provision is widespread. Hence this research will investigate PP

policy transfer and the mechanisms through which it occurs, as previous literature indicates that spatial and temporal policy transfer could be significant PP policy justifications.

Thus conceptually, policy transfer lends itself well to what this research investigates. It allows an exploration of how PP policy transfer occurs between schools and based on past experiences, i.e. voluntary transfer. Also, studying a MAT provides a new unit through which coercive policy transfer may occur due to its hierarchical authority. Hence understanding policy transfer processes in these differently governed institutions, the MATs and types of schools dominating the English landscape (Wilkins 2017), will be a conceptually novel and valuable contribution. Moreover, since some policies have greater effects on disadvantaged children's attainment and hence bring schools closer to attaining their goals (Hutchinson and Dunford 2016), it is important to understand the degree to which policy transfer regarding these occurs and its mechanisms. Integrating this with studying transfer in MAT and standalone academies will portray how transfer processes entrenched in or facilitated by different school contexts can promote PP provision that is based on 'what works' in other schools, the past or the MAT's influence.

Methodology

This research adopted a qualitative, comparative case study method involving five system leader MAT academies and five standalone academies with semi-structured interviews and documentary analysis. Case studies were selected as they are an appropriate means to deliver 'thick' description (Geertz 1973), meaning an in-depth,

contextualised exploration of academies' policies, factors which shape them and any policy transfer. They also lend themselves to holistically understanding how processes occur (Maxwell 2013), which is why policy transfer research frequently utilises them (Stone 2012). Specifically, this study employed homologous comparative cases with horizontal and vertical comparisons, drawn from Bartlett and Vavrus' (2009, 2014, 2017a, 2017b) case study research which they apply to education policy. They explain that homologous comparative cases such as schools have corresponding positions to one another, and "homologous studies compare and contrast... how similar forces (e.g., a policy...) result in similar and different practices, and why" (Bartlett and Vavrus 2017a, 52). This is conducive to studying voluntary PP policy transfer, as transfer occurs horizontally between parallel units i.e. academies, and variations between MAT and standalone academies are discerned through a logic of juxtaposition. This was combined with vertical comparisons, which focus on how the policy engages actors cutting across sites at different scales (Vavrus and Bartlett 2006). This enables studying the MAT's coercive PP policy transfer, as owning its academies places it a higher level or scale vertically.

The system leader MAT 'Education Trust' is selected as it is an influential case (Seawright and Gerring 2008), being one of the largest system leader MATs (Gov 2020a). Since it is also one of the highest in PP eligibility among such MATs (ibid), it may be expected to be impactful for other schools regarding PP policies particularly. Focusing on the academies, a maximum variation approach for purposive case selection which includes a diversity of schools on different dimensions of interest was used (Patton 2014). These dimensions include PP eligibility and region, as they usually influence PP policies, with schools with high, average and low proportions of PP pupils and schools in different regions varying in their policies (Carpenter et al. 2013; Macleod

et al. 2015; Barrett 2018). This purposive sampling approach was selected instead of, for example, random sampling in order to serve the purposes of the study – since it focuses on pupil disadvantage, it is useful to represent schools with high, average and low proportions of disadvantaged pupils in order to produce meaningful conclusions about different academies and not be biased towards a particular group of academies. To increase academies’ comparability, representation of standalone and MAT academies across regions and with low, average and high PP eligibility relative to the national average of 23% eligibility (Gov 2020b) was equalised as far as possible. Table 1 below outlines these academies’ descriptions. Information on inspection ratings by Ofsted is also available. Eastfolk Academy is rated as “Requires Improvement”, Tromerston Academy is ‘Outstanding’, while the other academies are ‘Good’. *[Table 1 here]*.

The corpus included semi-structured interviews and policy documents. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with key informants to yield detailed, specialised knowledge (Potter 2004) from leaders at the frontlines of determining and justifying PP policies (Carpenter et al. 2013). The topic guide was structured thematically to enquire about the types and reasons for provision for disadvantaged pupils, the PP’s role in this, and the influence of the MAT (where possible) and other schools (ibid). This was tailored for the academy and MAT staff. The interviewees, indicated on the institution’s websites to be responsible for PP provision were: the MAT’s Regional Director (South) i.e. their PP Lead, Hattington Academy’s and Singwood Academy’s Headteachers, and Honsern Academy’s Middle Leader i.e. Head of Years 5 and 6. Since each senior leader was contacted in every academy, those not interviewed had not responded to initial or follow-up requests.

However, the interviews' greater representation of MAT than standalone academies may be compensated for by the policy documents, which were available for every academy. They were analysed as they represent school leadership's 'take' on a policy which they wish to publicly convey to parents and governors (Ball et al. 2011). Academies' online PP Strategy Statements, which most academies are obligated to publish (DfE 2020a), were utilised. They typically describe PP provision, its rationale and desired outcomes for the upcoming year or three years and include reviews of the previous year's expenditure. Also analysed was the MAT's PP Framework, an internal document covering PP guidance disseminated to academies which was accessed through the MAT Regional Director.

To analyse the four interviews and 11 documents, thematic analysis was utilised. This is because it enables categorising and synthesising the overt dimensions of policies and their reasoning into patterns (Braun and Clarke 2006). Coding for this was an iterative process, employing a mainly deductive approach (Miles and Huberman 1994). This is because it enabled coding for the research question and producing conceptual groupings related to the empirical and conceptual literature (Patton 2014). After contrasting, comparing and refining codes, I developed an analytic hierarchy of 'main overarching themes' (Braun and Clarke 2006, 89) i.e., 'policies' and 'policy justifications' that map on to the research question, and themes within them that elaborate these to answer the question. These were reviewed to concur with the codes and overall story.

Importantly, ethical issues were regarded throughout, and this study was approved by the London School of Economics and Political Science's ethics committee. The participants' informed consent was obtained, and to protect their safety amidst

COVID-19, interviews were conducted via Microsoft Teams meetings or telephone calls, according to interviewees' preference. Finally, pseudonyms are employed to preserve confidentiality.

Yet this study has weaknesses. Since interviews depend on respondents' recall, participants potentially only remembering recent PP provision and transfer may decrease the findings' reliability (Blaikie 2000). However, the documents complemented the interviews, as they are pre-planned, written and reviewed, and thus can be used to confirm some of the interviewees' comments and note the details of provision (Bryman 2016). Nevertheless, the policy documents may lack validity, as being public-facing implies they may not accurately reflect what schools apply (Fitzgerald 2012). Using interviews where possible tackles this somewhat, as it facilitates probing and following-up to disclose additional insights (Kvale 1996). Yet this research possesses limited transferability (Lincoln and Guba 1985), with these academies not representative of others with different governance arrangements or varying local or socio-economic contexts. This may produce differences in policies and their rationale. Regardless, the cases exemplify a multidimensional range of academies which shed greater light on the PP in heterogenous contexts. The number of academies was also justified, as by the end of the analysis the results were similar, having reached saturation (Corbin and Strauss 2015).

Results

Policies

Theme: Academic, Pastoral and Extracurricular Provision

This study mirrors previous findings regarding provision for disadvantaged pupils, with this comprising mainly academic support, followed by pastoral support, and least prioritised, extracurricular provision. These are categorised and summarised together because these results were not novel compared to existing literature. This prioritisation of provision concerns the number and variety of policies in these areas. Table 2 categorises provision by staff-related, programme-specific and resource-based PP policies. There were no notable differences in this provision's composition between standalone and MAT academies, except for two MAT academies engaging with the MAT in reviewing and improving the curriculum. This is not solely targeted at PP pupils but focuses on assessing whether the curriculum meets their needs. Apart from this, one academy i.e. Eastfolk (average-PP), which 'Requires Improvement' according to Ofsted stated the MAT's advisers would teach 'model lessons', and the school would embed an 'improved writing journey' supported by the MAT. *[Table 2 here]*.

Theme: COVID-19 Provision

Innovative findings pertained to some academies' provision during the COVID-19-induced school closures revealed through interviews, which did not differ by MAT or standalone academies, or proportion of PP pupils. This encompasses meals for PP children prior to the government's extension of its FSM scheme (DfE 2020c), and pastoral support engaging with families' wellbeing. For example, Honsern Academy's interviewee stated a week after schools closed:

'We set a plan for coronavirus very quickly. [Education Trust] have been really good. We've been delivering school lunches to Pupil Premium children, and we're planning to make a food bank with individual food parcels for the whole family. We're in contact

with them too – the welfare team makes home visits’. (MAT, Average-PP).

Hattington Academy’s (MAT, high-PP) Headteacher also indicated a proactive response of providing lunches and having teachers call parents weekly. However, Singwood Academy’s Headteacher noted:

‘Disadvantaged children are often from disadvantaged families. We touch base weekly with home visits, Zoom calls. Children who are disadvantaged and vulnerable because of safeguarding, their families don’t want to engage with us. We need to be insistent. We don’t really have authority like social care, but we still do it’. (Standalone, Average-PP).

Therefore, the intersection of PP children’s identities where some are vulnerable to abuse means academies face challenges in reaching them, but have undertaken extra efforts to be updated on their learning and wellbeing.

Policy Justifications

Theme: Voluntary Policy Transfer between Schools

One contribution to PP policies, especially academic ones, was their transfer between schools. Education Trust as a system leader MAT clearly spreads best practice amongst its schools, thereby facilitating lesson-drawing from schools and policy transfer between them. The Trust Regional Director stated:

‘We’re fortunate because we’re a large national trust. We come together every term for a forum which is like a conference. All school heads give presentations on our priorities, so schools share what they’ve done and why they’ve worked. And we have accountability processes where the regional directors visit schools twice each term,

where we might elect to spend a visit focusing on the Pupil Premium. I could take a headteacher from a weak school with me to a strong one to spread practice, and heads talk to each other on the phone’.

This indicates the MAT’s termly forums and monitoring and evaluation processes of visiting academies along with headteachers increase lesson-drawing and hence policy transfer. This is confirmed by Honsern Academy’s (MAT, average-PP) interviewee, who noted many peer head visits entailing knowledge sharing occur, with PP policies always ‘high on their agenda’. This transfer is then strengthened by headteachers’ informal telephone calls and contact.

Hattington Academy’s Headteacher also emphasised how policy transfer underpins certain academic support including retrieval practices, which reinforce learning through low-stakes quizzes and are one of the academy’s key teaching strategies for promoting PP children’s attainment. She said:

‘The idea of retrieval practices to help disadvantaged children came from the trust, as we were expected to adopt that as a school improvement strategy. By then working together as heads in groups as part of the collective, we pick up strategies others are using. I heard a headteacher say something I liked so I contacted her and my staff went to her school to see it, which helped us develop our retrieval practice working party. So it was driven by the trust, and teachers are like magpies – we want to learn from each other’. (MAT, High-PP).

This illustrates how learning and transfer is facilitated by the MAT. While this policy’s initial adoption was influenced by the trust, headteachers’ communication allowed lessons about the details of its implementation across academies to be learned and integrated into Hattington’s working party’s strategies.

Moreover, the MAT aided PP policy transfer between academies as many of its academies are in deprived areas with disadvantaged populations. Hattington Academy's Headteacher explained:

'In this trust, academies are similar in similar demographic situations. You're not thinking 'that works for them because'. You're thinking 'if it works for them, I wonder if it'll work for us', then you're just strategic about it'. (MAT, High-PP).

This similarity was specific to Education Trust given its 'mission' of supporting disadvantaged children. This mitigates concerns about policies working differently in different environments and propels policy transfer.

In contrast, no standalone academy referred to learning from other schools. The exception to this was Singwood Academy (average-PP), whose Headteacher noted their collaboration with other schools through the local Teaching School Alliance, with this Headteacher acting as a strategic partner in it. He explained this grants them the autonomy to be a standalone academy but ability to 'reach out to others'. Regardless, he recognises that schools which are not part of MATs or LAs can be 'insular', with no formal routes for transfer unless they take initiative in joining relevant groups. He elaborated the type of policy transfer that occurs:

'I'm a Local Leader of Education and our teachers are Specialist Leaders in Education involved in government projects for improving other schools' numeracy and literacy. We tend to learn as much as the schools we help. For example, we picked up the York Assessment of Reading for Comprehension from the EEF while working with other schools, and for disadvantaged children it's valuable. We supported other schools with it then used it, because when we help them and know what happens there we really gain and improve performance ourselves'. (Standalone, Average-PP).

Here, policy transfer is a bidirectional process with feedback. Transferring an academic intervention which was discovered through studying research evidence to other schools and observing its strengths and weaknesses helped Singwood Academy learn good practice. However, this standalone academy's transfer was contingent on the staff's orientations and school's status.

Theme: Coercive Policy Transfer from the MAT

Since the MAT owns and has responsibility for its academies, it exercises coercive power by imposing some PP interventions on them, as portrayed below:

'Disadvantaged pupils' progress and achievement will be evaluated through subject "deep dives" to establish whether disadvantaged pupils experience unnecessary "narrowing" of their curriculum'. – Education Trust PP Framework.

'Curriculum Deep Dives are undertaken with leaders, supported by the Regional Director and external consultant to assess the curriculum's depth, chronology and impact and establish a coherent evidence base for quality education... The Trust will monitor and challenge leaders to ensure the curriculum is challenging and well-sequenced'. – Avonlead Academy PP Document. (MAT, High-PP).

'Work with Regional Director to improve curriculum and ensure youngest pupils catch up quickly'. – Eastfolk Academy PP Document. (MAT, Average-PP).

This shows the MAT pushes its academies regarding academic provision, specifically in organising their curriculum, as manifested in Avonlead and Eastfolk noting collaboration with the Regional Director and MAT accountability. The MAT making certain policies including curriculum reviews a requirement implies direct

coercive policy transfer occurs.

Furthermore, some provision may be legitimised by the MAT exerting indirect coercive transfer. The MAT's PP Framework indicates this, as it outlines what PP-related support academies can request from the MAT. This includes PP cluster training for senior leaders, a PP webinar and full PP review entailing data analysis followed by a day on-site. Academies may feel obligated to seek such MAT intervention if PP children are not meeting targets, generating more indirect coercive policy transfer from the MAT.

Alternatively, standalone academies are not accountable to a MAT and hence have freedom in pursuing their policies. Singwood Academy's Headteacher articulated:

'It's absolutely different from the MATs. We decide our funding priorities and we're very proactive and quick-acting. When coronavirus happened, we planned our response and provision in one afternoon. So if a parent says "this happened to my child", I can sort provision immediately'. (Standalone, Average-PP).

Thus the absence of top-down MAT influence means they perceive themselves as having flexibility in determining their PP provision and reacting to new issues. However, this is coupled with the possibility of hastily choosing or continuing poor provision unchecked.

Theme: Voluntary Policy Transfer from Past Experiences

All schools had academic, extracurricular and pastoral provision informed by their past experiences with it, with no differences observed between MAT and standalone academies regarding this. They engaged in policy transfer based on knowledge of recent

interventions' success or lack thereof. For example, Garringland Academy states:

'One-to-one tuition was less effective for pupils with SEN or emotional needs. If we use this again, it will be to boost children just below age-related expectations'. (Standalone, Low-PP).

This indicates how policies were adjusted and justified according to past experiences as academies reflected on the provision's flaws and potential improvements. Most commonly though, this temporal policy transfer promoted policies' continuity because their impact was 'proven', either quantifiably through achievement, as occurred for academic interventions, or in less tangible ways including PP children's improved self-esteem and behaviour, which happened for pastoral and extracurricular provision.

Theme: School-specific Needs

Academies explained some policies were driven by the needs of PP children particular to that school, such as those stemming from specific deficiencies their PP children face, or disadvantageous local circumstances. They justified pastoral and academic interventions, from programmes to heal PP families' trauma in Garringland Academy (standalone, low-PP), to writing projects targeting PP boys in Chefton Academy. Specifically in Chefton Academy, one policy focused on improving PP-related communication to parents through bilingual meetings because:

'Pupil Premium numbers have dropped significantly over recent years, not reflecting what we know about our families. [Chefton] has significant numbers of pupils who do not appear to qualify for PP funding, despite severe hardship at home. This is down to various facts, including cultural issues, Visa status and families not knowing their

rights'. (Standalone, High-PP).

Hence this was motivated by comprehending pupils' needs and backgrounds, whereby their families' cultural and linguistic barriers raises the need to target them for FSM registration and thereby increase PP funding and provision.

Yet standalone academies were not any more likely to use their understanding of school-specific needs to justify their PP policies, as MAT academies also did. This is exemplified by Wendinglale Academy, which recognises its school demographic and their subsequent needs through this explanation for their in-class targeted support:

'Various new children for whom English is an additional language form the majority of our pupils. Support needed to ensure they make accelerated progress upon joining'.
(MAT, Low-PP).

This suggests Wendinglale embeds the intersections of children's identity in its policies given its diverse population, demonstrating that MAT academies do not necessarily display a greater propensity to adopt uniform policies.

Theme: Research Evidence

Research evidence from government and charitable organisations and general, uncited sources was typically referenced, the most common source being Education Endowment Foundation (EEF) research. This evidence was evaluation research, portraying correlations and causal evidence between interventions and desired outcomes such as PP children's attainment. Research was most commonly cited to support academic interventions including teacher training and small group or one-to-one tuition. For instance, Hamletshire Academy's rationale for targeted Phonics support for PP children

is:

‘EEF Evidence: “Three evaluations of one-to-one tuition interventions (see Catch Up Numeracy, Literacy and Switch-on Reading) found impacts of between three and five months’ additional progress, suggesting schools can successfully replicate positive impacts”’. (Standalone, Average-PP).

This usage of evidence underpinning academic support is more detailed and cites direct, measurable impacts compared to the evidence drawn upon in informing pastoral and extracurricular provision, where evidence utilisation occurred less frequently. For example, Tromerston Academy justified employing a counsellor with PP funding by stating:

‘Public Health Briefing (2014) stated “pupils with better wellbeing achieve better academically”’. (Standalone, Low-PP).

This reflects how evidence for these interventions is usually unquantified and vague, not specifying particular forms of provision to, for example, improve wellbeing.

Comparatively, standalone academies were more likely to cite evidence, and do so for a wider range of provision while describing this evidence. Indeed, MAT academies Wendinglale (low-PP) and Avonlead (average-PP) had no reference to evidence in justifying their decisions. Yet the Trust Regional Director revealed the MAT’s PP policies are based on EEF evidence and best practice from their schools with the best outcomes for PP children. She explained they share this and government evidence with their academies for them to use, with their PP Framework referencing the latter.

Academy Comparisons

[Table 3 here].

Table 3 summarises each PP policy area by its rationale and the academies which adopted this. The starkest contrast between standalone and MAT academies lies in coercive policy transfer's influence, experienced by almost each MAT academy. This difference is expected since standalone academies are not accountable to MATs. This is followed by MAT academies' greater propensity and ability to transfer policies between academies. Nonetheless, policy transfer based on past experiences is unaffected by academy structure, and is the most recurrent justification for policies, particularly academic ones. This occurs through maintaining and adapting policies due to lessons drawn about past interventions. Related to this is constructing policies according to school-specific needs, which is unexpectedly more prevalent in MAT than standalone academies. Hence although standalone academies possess greater freedom than MAT ones, this may not be associated with responsiveness to local needs. This is coupled with standalone academies' focus on academic factors i.e. research evidence to inform their policies. They display greater thoroughness in explaining evidence than MAT academies, who, if using evidence, often state 'evidence shows' without referencing particular sources or elaborating.

Discussion

The academic, pastoral and extracurricular PP provision and its composition concur with that found previously (Ofsted 2012; Carpenter et al. 2013; Ofsted 2013; Macleod et al. 2015; Abbott et al. 2015; Abbott et al. 2016; Dann 2016; Shain 2016; Barrett

2018), including academic interventions being the most common (Macleod et al. 2015). This is possibly because PP funding has been granted since 2011, suggesting schools have already established their primary forms of provision which they deem comprehensive and thus have continued offering this. This may explain why these policies exist regardless of school structure. Alternatively, this research sheds new light on coronavirus-related provision. This has concentrated on pastoral interventions and resource provision, perhaps due to the pandemic's effect on children's wellbeing and economic circumstances (Cullinane and Montacute 2020).

Greater insights can be gleaned by answering the part of the research question about justifying PP usage and the role of policy transfer, as transfer plays a prominent role in justifying PP policies. Where past research portrayed that three-quarters of primary schools refer to other schools' PP practices (Carpenter et al. 2013), my qualitative findings also demonstrate how voluntary policy transfer between academies occurs. It entails lesson-drawing based on other institutions' experiences (Dolowitz and Marsh 1996), where academies learn from, and subsequently transfer, other academies' teaching and assessment policies for PP children.

Notable distinctions between MAT and standalone academies in this voluntary policy transfer exist, as MAT academies may be better placed to engage in this. A MAT's structure and the similarity of contexts among academies in Education Trust particularly eases voluntary policy transfer between academies. Indeed, Education Trust has formal and informal mechanisms to promote such transfer. Formal mechanisms encompass the MAT's institutionalised practices, including regular forums with headteacher presentations, and headteachers of academies with low PP student outcomes accompanying regional directors to visit high-performing academies. This

additional knowledge of other academies' PP policies, which is unavailable for schools outside the MAT, is complemented with knowledge from informal mechanisms that fosters voluntary transfer between academies. This refers to communication and support between senior leadership teams occurring on an ad hoc basis highlighted in Hattington Academy (high-PP). This coincides with how strong headteacher networks exist in MATs (Salokangas and Chapman, 2014; Cirin 2017), and they share practices through organic processes of discussion and joint working (Greany 2018). Based on this transfer facilitated by exchange relationships (Evans and Davies 1999), academies often emulate policies (Rose 1993). These official and unofficial mechanisms of sharing expertise within the MAT may uncover why 96% of MATs report their structure eases school-to-school collaboration (Cirin 2017).

Furthermore, MAT academies' greater ability to engage in voluntary transfer is explained by their contexts' comparability. The similarities in academies' sociodemographic compositions in Education Trust, which has a greater representation of academies with high proportions of PP students (Gov 2020a), increases policy lessons' transferability (Mossberger and Wolman 2003). This helps mitigate inappropriate policy transfer (Dolowitz and Marsh 2000), and occurs despite Greany and Higham (2018) and Ofsted (2019) arguing many academies prioritise transfer from local schools over those in their MAT. Moreover, this transfer is reinforced by compatibility in ambitions (Crossley and Watson 2009), as the academies have values congruent to the MAT's in focusing on disadvantaged pupils, aligning with findings about MAT-wide priorities (Greany 2018).

Yet despite government anticipations of system leader MATs playing a larger role across the education system (DfE 2016), there was no mention of transferring

policies to schools outside the MAT. This counters expectations of Education Trust having a 'role model' status to schools regarding PP provision, as this practice does not become public knowledge. This also accords with how some MATs are more introverted rather than catalysts for broader educational change (Hill et al. 2012; Kaukoa and Salokangas 2015).

Contrary to MAT academies, no standalone academies except one engaged in voluntary policy transfer between schools. This may result from their relatively isolated status compared to MAT academies, where policy transfer is not embedded within standalone academies' structure. This diverges from Cirin's finding that 87% of standalone academies collaborate with other schools. This could be because he found the most common form of collaboration experienced by 81% of primary standalone academies concerns general joint practice development, whereas PP policy transfer concerns specific provision. The standalone academy Singwood (average-PP), which mentioned policy transfer between schools as informing its assessment of PP students was not a typical case (Yin 2018). This is because the Headteacher is a strategic partner in a Teaching School Alliance, and he and his staff are Local and Specialist Leaders of Education. This academy's formal mechanisms of transfer and interventional role corroborates how other standalone academies' school-to-school collaboration is sometimes done by deploying such Leaders of Education (Hill et al. 2012; Cirin 2017). Also, this policy transfer intersected with research evidence utilisation, since the Headteacher noted the policy Singwood recommended to another school was from the EEF.

Although standalone academies may find voluntary policy transfer on a horizontal level between academies more challenging and rarely partake in it, they face

no coercive policy transfer pressures imposed by a MAT. This reflects how another feature of MAT's' structure, i.e. their ownership of academies and academies' accountability to them (Ehren and Perryman 2018), facilitates coercive transfer. Indeed, the MAT, especially as it is a system leader one, may be replacing LAs in driving particular provision while excluding schools outside of the MAT. Thus while standalone academies including Singwood (average-PP) feel they can have more adaptable policies, the absence of MAT accountability implies standalone academies with low PP pupil achievement may continue offering ineffective provision unmonitored. Alternatively, MAT academies' curriculum changes targeting PP pupils and related school improvement strategies stem from the MAT's coercive transfer. The greater control in Eastfolk Academy (average-PP) which 'Requires Improvement' aligns with how within a MAT, low-performing schools face greater intervention (Salokangas and Chapman 2014; Keddie 2019) including through learning model lessons from the MAT (Greany 2018).

Yet although Greany and Higham and Ofsted find larger MATs are highly likely to impose centralised policies through their hierarchical authority, this study involving one of the largest MATs portrays greater nuance. Education Trust's influence on academies' PP policies entails a mixture of coercive and voluntary elements of policy transfer. For example, while being compelled to apply retrieval practices when teaching PP children, Hattington Academy's (high-PP) Headteacher used her agency to voluntarily draw lessons and transfer other academies' policies regarding this. Moreover, Eastfolk's (average-PP) and Avonlead's (high-PP) reference to their curriculum 'deep dives' focusing on disadvantaged pupils being supported by the MAT indicates they had some autonomy regarding these, but the MAT's approval also grants them legitimacy. This supports how MATs often have MAT-wide curriculum policies,

but devolve their details to schools (Cirin 2017; Menzies et al. 2018; Ofsted 2019). This discretion academies possess suggests the extent to which the MAT's PP policy transfer is direct coercive may be mitigated. Furthermore, indirect coercive policy transfer may occur when the voluntary aspect of seeking the MAT's support converges with the perceived necessity and MAT-driven accountability to improve performance. Since MAT data collection and monitoring compare academies with one another (Ehren and Godfrey 2017), an academy behind in achieving its PP performance goals may be pressurised to use one of the MAT's services. Therefore, transfer regarding PP policies occurs with varying combinations of conscious decision and coerciveness.

A form of policy transfer that did not vary depending on the type of academy was voluntary policy transfer based on past experiences, a crucial and the most common justification for PP provision. This may align with Carpenter, et al.'s assertion that almost all academies use their internal monitoring and evaluation to inform PP policies. Since PP reviews of past provision are required (DfE 2019c), reflecting on lessons learned is encouraged and prevents uninformed policy transfer (Dolowitz and Marsh 1996). This is because academies have adopted and evaluated such policies recently, making them the most informed about them. This often fostered the strongest degree of transfer i.e. copying, as academies replicated policies which were evaluated as successful (Rose 1991). Lesson-drawing from the past also generated adaptation of policies to target them towards certain types of PP students, including those with borderline performance in Garringland Academy (low-PP). Schools noting their experience with and observations of applied PP provision in order to adapt their policies is what Macleod et al. (2015) finds schools which experience more success in using the PP do. Here, every academy used such temporal transfer to justify their academic provision, because transfer is more amenable to policies with clearly measurable returns

(Rose 1993; Barrett 2018).

Furthermore, PP policies were explained as meeting school-specific needs, not only needs faced by disadvantaged children generally. This was often done by considering intersectionality in identities that can disadvantage children alongside economic deprivation (Crenshaw 1991), including their gender or English as an Additional Language status (Craske 2018), and having academic interventions to target this. ‘Good’ academies did this, which is significant considering Outstanding schools (Abbott, Middlewood, and Robinson 2015) and those with success in using PP funding adopt policies motivated by comprehending children’s personal needs (Macleod et al. 2015). Surprisingly, MAT academies employed this reasoning slightly more often than standalone academies, despite Singwood Academy’s (average-PP) Headteacher’s claim that standalone academies can be more responsive. This contradicts Chapman and Salokangas’ (2012) and Greany and Higham’s suggestions that MAT academies offer homogenised, national solutions rather than local ones. This may be because MATs prescribe policies in some areas more than others (Greany 2018; Menzies et al. 2018). This implies they set the groundwork of policies through coercive transfer, while freeing academies to perform the additional labour of tailoring policies to local needs.

Another unexpected finding was MAT academies drawing on evidence to underpin their PP provision less frequently and in less depth than standalone academies. Research suggests 65% of schools utilise academic research (Carpenter et al. 2013), and evidence’s significance, especially for justifying academic PP interventions (Macleod et al. 2015), was also found here. Yet MATs are intended to be centralised sources of expertise in collating evidence, and system leader MAT’s’ influential status implies they may utilise evidence more heavily (DfE 2016). Indeed, the MAT’s Regional

Director mentioned their expectation that their academies use evidence. However, these academies did not seem advantaged in this respect, as the standalone academies used greater evidence and in different ways, employing detail and precision in citing particular sections of evidence to support their provision. Perhaps MAT academies do not feel the need to mention evidence as their policies transferred from the MAT are already evidence-based. Alternatively, standalone academies may feel greater pressure to legitimise their policies with evidence to compensate for their limited policy transfer.

Conclusion

This study has illustrated 10 primary system leader MAT and standalone academies' policies for disadvantaged pupils, their justifications and the differences between these academies, applying a conceptualisation of policy transfer to this. It may be somewhat constrained by its limited interview data. However, documents were more accessible than interviews because of COVID-19's school closures, and being publicly available and targeted towards parents and Trust directors makes them well-suited to understanding what schools desire to articulate as their policies and justifications.

This research makes a conceptual contribution by extending the study of policy transfer, both spatial and temporal, voluntary and coercive, to new institutional contexts. It illuminates transfer between different types of privately-owned, publicly funded schools on a horizontal level, and through examining a system leader MAT, arguably one of the most influential types of English educational institutions (Hillary et al. 2016), on a vertical level. It builds upon the policy transfer framework by illustrating it in a comparative setting rather than the common approach of single case studies, revealing similarities and differences in the forms of transfer which occur across academies and

the mechanisms through which they do. Focusing on the PP allowed an exploration of policy transfer when academies enact a nationally prescribed policy with discretion to decide their interventions.

This study supports the categories of coercive and voluntary transfer, which would be expected to be found in system leader MAT academies. Across policies there was often a complex interplay of direct coercive transfer, where academies may be dictated what curriculum changes to make; indirect coercive transfer, where accountability measures prompt academies to request MAT support; and voluntary transfer, where academy headteachers formally or informally learn from their peers. Conversely and in line with what policy transfer theorists would suggest, standalone academies face no coercive policy transfer since they are not controlled by a centralised institution.

Yet this research challenges the policy transfer framework regarding its view of the relationship between transferring and borrowing entities. Policy transfer tends to depict the transferring entity as a static one which merely gives lessons, and the borrowing institution as an active one that receives, adapts and applies policy lessons. However, as in the case of a standalone academy ran by a Local Leader of Education, this research suggests that there are numerous rounds of interactions between institutions, where the transferring institution later learns from the borrowing institution based on their feedback and experiences. Therefore, policy transfer should be regarded as a bidirectional and dynamic process where the transferring institution's depository of best practice becomes updated as it draws lessons from the entity to which it had transferred policies.

While voluntary transfer was often a means to learn from best practice, there are possible dangers regarding uncritical policy transfer. Even among academies in the

same MAT and ‘family’, heterogeneity exists in PP proportions, school region and other factors related to pupil disadvantage and achievement, and these must be adjusted for to avoid inappropriate transfer. Indeed, no evidence was found of voluntary transfer taking the form of a combination of policies or of policies being an inspiration, in relation to Dolowitz and Marsh’s (2000) degrees of policy transfer. However, the finding that academies were likely to emulate rather than completely copy policies indicates that they were at least somewhat critical in their transfer. This relates to how MAT academies, which more regularly engaged in policy transfer than standalone academies, were also more likely to have policies motivated by school-specific needs, alleviating concerns about simplistic policy transfer.

This research also contributes to the empirical literature by qualitatively portraying how academies with different structures tend to rely more heavily on different sources to inform their policies aimed at transforming disadvantaged children’s educational attainment. MAT academies are better equipped to voluntarily transfer PP policies from other academies and transfer policies systematically, whether through coercion or encouragement, from the MAT. Yet both standalone and MAT academies draw lessons from the past and partake in policy transfer based on this, and standalone academies, while catering less to school-specific needs, appear to view research evidence as more important in justifying their PP policies than MAT academies. Since these reasons are usually linked with academies’ structure, whereby belonging to a system leader MAT or being a standalone academy may facilitate such justifications, they could potentially reflect different types of academies’ reasoning for other policies, such as school-wide policies or those for other vulnerable groups of children.

This study has important policy implications, as the government favours establishing MAT academies with the expectation of collaboration and evidence utilisation, especially by system leader MATs (DfE 2021a). Hence this research suggests that whether system leader MAT or standalone academies are viewed more positively depends on the degree to which policy transfer or evidence-based policy are valued as policy justifications. Yet this trade-off need not exist. A policy change could be to formalise schools' access to successful practices and hence policy transfer, if not through MAT membership, then through encouraging schools to join a Teaching School Alliance where they may learn policies. Since schools are accountable for PP expenditure and it is pivotal to governmental efforts to tackle educational disadvantage, transferring policies on this basis should be embedded within regular school practice. This also caters for the 16% of academies which are standalone and not MAT academies (DfE 2020d). Additionally, schools could be obliged to utilise evidence when justifying their policies in their PP documents, prompted by specific sections devoted to this in the government's PP Strategy Statement templates. This is even more critical now, as COVID-19's effects on disadvantaged children's performance and their greater learning loss (DfE 2021d) intensify the need to use PP funding effectively.

Since standalone and system leader MAT academies produce insightful but not generalisable comparisons, further research could investigate PP provision and reasons underpinning it in a wider range of MAT academies of different sizes. We could then understand whether their structures distinctly affect their policies for disadvantaged children and engagement in policy transfer compared with system leader MAT and standalone academies.

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Table 1: Academy Descriptions

PP Eligibility	Standalone Academy	System Leader MAT Academy
Low	Tromerston (London)	Wendinglale (London)
	Garringland (South-East);	
Average	Hamletshire (South-East);	Honsern (South-East);
	Singwood (Yorkshire and Humberside)	Eastfolk (South-East)
High	Chefton (North-West)	Avonlead (North-West)
		Hattington (Yorkshire and Humberside);

Table 2: Pupil Premium Provision.

Forms	Policies		
	Academic	Pastoral	Extracurricular
Staff	Staff training and Continuing Professional Development; Additional teaching assistants; Speech and language therapist.	Staff trauma-related training; Counsellor; Educational Welfare Officer; Family Liaison Officer; Attendance Officer.	N/A
Programmes	Small group and one-to-one tuition; Targeted Literacy and Mathematics programmes e.g., Rapid Phonics, Success@Arithmetic; Rosenshein’s Principles of Instruction e.g., retrieval practices; assessment tools e.g., YARC/NFER; Curriculum Deep Dives.	Play and trauma therapy; Clinical counselling; Parenting programme; Home Learning Help toolkits; Parental-themed school events.	Breakfast club; Pupil leadership programme; Music and language lessons.
Resources	iPad for learning; Home library.	N/A	Subsidising residentials, school trips, clubs.

Table 3: Academy Comparisons.

Justifications	Policies		
	Academic	Pastoral	Extracurricular
Voluntary Policy	<u>Hattington (H)</u> ;	N/A	N/A
Transfer between Schools	Singwood (A); <u>Honsern (A)</u> ; <u>Eastfolk (A)</u>		
Coercive Policy	<u>Hattington (H)</u> ;	N/A	N/A
Transfer from the MAT	<u>Honsern (A)</u> ; <u>Avonlead (H)</u> ; <u>Eastfolk (A)</u>		
Voluntary Policy	All	Garringland (L); Tromerston (L); <u>Wendinglale (L)</u> ;	Garringland (L); Tromerston (L); <u>Wendinglale (L)</u> ;
Transfer from Past Experiences		<u>Honsern (A)</u> ; <u>Avonlead (H)</u> ; Singwood (A)	<u>Honsern (A)</u> ; <u>Avonlead (H)</u> ; Chefton (H); <u>Hattington (H)</u>
Research Evidence	Garringland (L); <u>Hattington (H)</u> ; Tromerston (L); <u>Honsern (A)</u> ; Hamletshire (A); Chefton (H)	Tromerston (L); <u>Honsern (A)</u> ; Hamletshire (A); Chefton (H)	Tromerston (L); <u>Honsern (A)</u> ; Hamletshire (A)
School-specific Needs	Chefton (H); <u>Wendinglale (L)</u> ; <u>Hattington (H)</u> ; <u>Avonlead (H)</u>	Garringland (L); <u>Avonlead (H)</u> ; Chefton (H)	<u>Avonlead (H)</u>

Note: Underlined academies are MAT academies, and L, A and H refer to low, average and high PP proportions.