



ETHNIC DIVIDES IN SCHOOLING

DISCUSSION PAPER

In a Class of their Own



CENTRE
FOR POLICY
DEVELOPMENT

CREATE. CONNECT. CONVINCED

<http://www.cpd.org.au>

MAY 2019

CHRISTINA HO

AUTHOR

Dr Christina Ho is a Senior Lecturer in Social and Political Sciences at the University of Technology Sydney, where she researches inequality and diversity in education, Asian migrant experiences in Australia, and urban intercultural relations. Her books include *Asian Migration and Education Cultures in the Anglosphere*; *'For those who've come across the seas': Australian Multicultural Theory, Policy and Practice*; *Beyond the Hijab Debates: New Conversations on Gender, Race and Religion* and *Migration and Gender Identity: Chinese Women's Experiences of Work, Family and Identity in Contemporary Australia*.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The author wishes to acknowledge the assistance of Chris Bonnor and Geoff Shuetrim, and to thank James Button, Peter Browne and Mark Burford for their feedback.

The ongoing work in Effective Government is possible because of contributions from CPD's program and organisational donors, including the Community and Public Sector Union (CPSU), the Susan McKinnon Foundation, Brian and Diana Snape, the Garry White Foundation, and many individual Ideas Sustainers. We would also like to thank CPD subscribers, followers, and individual donors, whose contributions make our work possible. You can read more about the Effective Government Program [here](#).

ABOUT THE EFFECTIVE GOVERNMENT PROGRAM

The Effective Government Program examines how Australia can best ensure that its public institutions deliver active and effective government in the 21st century. This means tackling long-term policy challenges, delivering high-quality services to the community, weathering existential shocks from abroad, and instilling in the public a shared confidence and respect in their public institutions, and in one another. The role of education in Australia, and public funding for it, has long been a focus of the program.

Ethnic Divides is the fourth in a series entitled *In a Class of Their Own*, within the Effective Government Program. The first in the series, *A Creeping Indigenous Separation*, highlights the plight of Indigenous students, increasingly found in schools with the least capacity to support them. The second, *Institutionalised Separation*, broadens concerns about the effect of selective schooling on the unselected students and their schools. The third, *Separating Scholars*, analyses end-of-school measures of student achievement to show growing clusters of advantage and disadvantage in Australian schools.

ABOUT CPD

The Centre for Policy Development (CPD) is an independent, values-driven, and evidence-based policy institute. Our motivation is an Australia that embraces the long term now. CPD's policy development is geared towards an Australia that is equitable, aspirational, and truly prosperous – and enlivened by the challenge of shaping a better future. CPD's core model is three-fold: we create viable ideas from rigorous, cross-disciplinary research at home and abroad. We connect experts and stakeholders to develop these ideas into practical policy proposals. We then work to convince government, businesses, and communities to implement these proposals. CPD has offices in Sydney and Melbourne and a network of experts across Australia. We are not for profit: donations to our Research Fund are tax deductible. More information about CPD is available at <https://cpd.org.au/>.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

AUTHOR	2
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	2
ABOUT THE EFFECTIVE GOVERNMENT PROGRAM.....	2
ABOUT CPD	2
INTRODUCTION.....	4
FROM ‘ETHNIC DISADVANTAGE’ TO THE ‘MODEL MINORITY’	5
CAN WE GENERALISE ABOUT LBOTE STUDENTS?	6
ETHNICITY AND ADVANTAGE	8
HIGH LBOTE SCHOOLS AND DISADVANTAGE.....	11
ANGLO-DOMINATED SCHOOLS AND ADVANTAGE	13
SCHOOL CHOICE; SEEKING ‘PEOPLE LIKE US’	14
DO OUR SCHOOLS REFLECT THEIR NEIGHBOURHOODS?.....	16
CONCLUSION	17
REFERENCES.....	18

INTRODUCTION

Australian schools are more culturally diverse than ever. Many decades of migration, from increasingly diverse source countries, have created a rich mix of students in our schools, particularly in major urban areas. In New South Wales (NSW) government schools, approximately one third of students come from a language background other than English (LBOTE), speaking more than 230 different languages (NSW DoE 2018). In Victorian government schools, 27 per cent of students are from a LBOTE and 13 per cent are English as an Additional Language (EAL) learners (Vic DET 2018).

This discussion paper examines the impact of increasing cultural diversity on our education system in two main arenas: firstly, variation of educational outcomes of LBOTE students and, secondly, enrolment in schools. In both cases, ethnicity is mediated by social class, and indeed, divisions and inequalities that may initially seem to be explained by ethnic difference are often in fact about unequal access to the economic and other resources required for educational success.

Using *My School* data, the analysis shows varying educational outcomes of students from a language background other than English (LBOTE). At one end of the spectrum, the high-achieving children of skilled Asian migrants are now highly visible in selective schools and classes and on Year 12 honour lists. On average, 83% of students in Sydney's fully selective schools are from a LBOTE. However, the stereotype of the 'Asian high achiever' masks the enormous diversity of experiences of LBOTE students, and the continued disadvantage faced by many of these students. Other students from migrant backgrounds are concentrated in lower-income areas and continue to experience disadvantage. Sydney has 125 schools where more than 90% of students are from a LBOTE. These schools are concentrated in western and south-western Sydney, are more likely to be socio-economically disadvantaged, and are below average in terms of academic performance.

The mixed experience of LBOTE students is also reflected in school enrolments. Even in our multicultural capital cities, there are some schools with barely any LBOTE students, and other schools with large majorities of students from a LBOTE. To a significant extent, this reflects the uneven distribution of migrants across our suburbs, but as this discussion paper shows, the schools themselves do not reflect the cultural diversity of their communities. There are also striking divisions between government and non-government schools in their enrolment of LBOTE students. Sydney, for example, has 99 schools with a student LBOTE population of less than 10%, and they are largely non-government schools and clustered in the North Shore and Eastern Suburbs. These schools are much less culturally diverse than the suburbs in which they are located.

Many of these 'ethnic divides' reflect official policies encouraging school choice, which enable families to bypass their local school in search of a 'better' school or student cohort. Schools now exist in a marketplace increasingly characterised by competition and hierarchies, which tends to disadvantage families with lower levels of financial or cultural capital. In a multicultural society, schools have a vital role to play in ensuring that all young Australians have the knowledge and skills they need to be active citizens, and to operate in a globalising world. However, this discussion paper shows that increasing inequality and division are undermining our schools' capacity to build these qualities in the next generation.

This paper is the fourth discussion paper in CPD's *In a Class of Their Own* series on disadvantage in Australia's schools. The series explores different facets of Australia's contemporary school system and how it impacts students, families and communities.

FROM 'ETHNIC DISADVANTAGE' TO THE 'MODEL MINORITY' LBOTE STUDENTS IN AUSTRALIAN SCHOOLS

Traditionally, students from migrant backgrounds were viewed as educationally disadvantaged, but in recent decades this has changed. Children of post-war migrants tended to be seen as under-achievers in Australian schools. Reflecting their working-class backgrounds, they were over-represented in disadvantaged schools and had relatively low university admission rates (Kalantzis and Cope 1988). However, since the 1980s Australia's immigration policy has increasingly emphasised skilled migration over family reunion migration. Thus, more recent migrants - particularly those from Asia - have been more likely to be educated, middle-class professionals, and their children have emerged as some of the top performers in our schools.

Since the 1980s, the 'ethnic disadvantage' thesis and assumptions about 'cultural deficits' of children of migrants have been joined by new theories proposing an ethnic *advantage* (Bullivant 1988; Birrell 1987; Marks 2000; Meade et al 1983). Discussing the motivation and ambition of migrant families, Bullivant (1988) described an 'ethnic success ethic', and even claimed that as migrants settled into Australian society, they faced 'contamination' from 'Anglo values that denigrate drive and success' (Bullivant 1988: 80). Despite often facing cultural or language barriers, researchers argued that migrant families brought with them a unique aspiration to succeed, with children's education seen as a paramount means for social advancement. Birrell (1987) argued that family support and 'ethnic' valuing of education and upward mobility allowed LBOTE students to overcome any disadvantage related to migration.

There is evidence that students from migrant backgrounds perform better than average in school. Overall, LBOTE students have higher levels of high school completion. In 2000, Marks found that 84 per cent of students from non-English speaking backgrounds completed the Victorian Certificate of Education (VCE) compared to an average of 79 per cent across Victoria. Students from a LBOTE outperform others in many areas of the NAPLAN test administered annually to students in Years 3, 5, 7 and 9 (Tovey 2013; Gleeson 2016). Overall, Chesters and Daly (2017) found that mean NAPLAN scores were higher for LBOTE students than non-LBOTE students. Meanwhile, Marks (2014) found that LBOTE students' results in reading were lower than those of native English speakers, but in numeracy, they were at similar or higher levels. Considine and Zappala (2002) found that LBOTE students from regions other than the Middle East and Africa were three times more likely to achieve outstanding results than their English-speaking peers. As this last point suggests, although on average LBOTE students appear to be performing well, it is difficult to make generalisations about this group as a whole, because of the great variation within the LBOTE category.

CAN WE GENERALISE ABOUT LBOTE STUDENTS?

Decades of research have found greater variation in educational achievement *within* the LBOTE cohort than between LBOTE and non-LBOTE students (Meade et al 1983; Birrell 1986; Birrell et al 1995; Cahill et al 1996; Dobson et al 1996; Marks 2000). Similarly, NAPLAN results show that variation among LBOTE students is greater than that among non-LBOTE students (Rice 2016; Creagh 2014; Lingard et al 2012).

LBOTE is a very broad category that includes any student who speaks, or whose parents speak, a language other than English at home. This means that it includes everyone from new arrivals who do not speak English at all, to Australian-born children of migrants who have spoken English all their lives. It includes everyone from refugees with very little formal schooling, to educationally advantaged second generation migrants who have spent their entire schooling career in Australia.

Learners of English as an additional language or dialect (EALD) are included in the category of LBOTE, but often their experiences are not specifically reported. Creagh argues that these students have been 'invisibilised' (2016: 279) in the focus on LBOTE averages. She notes, 'If a group of students who are not performing well on NAPLAN are rendered statistically invisible, then equity of educational outcome for this group is impossible' (Creagh 2016: 285).

Relatedly, students' migration history can also shape their educational achievement. Creagh (2014) shows that students from refugee backgrounds perform at the lower end of the national minimum standard in NAPLAN, while those from skilled migrant backgrounds are well above average. She concludes that the LBOTE data 'are in fact hiding some of our most disadvantaged students' (Creagh 2014: 1).

Overall, the LBOTE category masks great internal variation in relation to social class, which has a powerful impact on educational achievement. The resources available to educated, middle-class migrant parents translate into innumerable educational advantages for children, from the school catchment area they can afford to live in, or the private school fees they can afford to pay, to the investments made in resources such as books and educational experiences, and private tutoring. Overall, the home environments, parenting styles and expectations of middle-class families are much more aligned with formal schooling than those of working-class families.

Even when English is spoken within the homes of ethnic minority students, the type of English used often differs by social class. As Cahill et al (1996) argue, migrant students from high status backgrounds will often have learnt English from a very young age, and it will likely have been ‘directed towards academic “type” purposes and cognitive styles’. The English spoken by working-class migrants is more likely to be based on a ‘non-standard variety of English that will disadvantage them in formal situations’ – if they speak English in the home at all (Windle 2004: 282).

Selective school cohorts illustrate the importance of social class and educational success. As detailed below, selective schools are heavily comprised of by LBOTE students. However, these students do not represent the full spectrum of ethnic minority students. Rather, they represent some of the most socio-educationally advantaged students within migrant communities, and indeed, in the Australian community. As explained in *Institutionalised Separation* (Ho et al 2018), an earlier paper in this series, almost three quarters (73 per cent) of selective school students come from the highest quarter of socio-educational advantage. Only 2 per cent come from the lowest quarter. The fierce competition to secure a place in these top performing schools has made them all but inaccessible to students from disadvantaged backgrounds.

These differences based on class and migration history are sometimes hidden behind the stereotype of the high achieving LBOTE student, and statistics that show LBOTE students *on average* performing at or above the level of Anglo-Australian students. However, acknowledging the internal diversity of LBOTE students is important, because simply relying on broad aggregations or averages can lead policy-makers to justify funding cuts to initiatives that are still needed, such as English as a Second Language (ESL) programs (Creagh 2016).

ETHNICITY AND ADVANTAGE

THE ASIAN-AUSTRALIAN ‘MODEL MINORITY’

Comparing the results of specific ethnic groups shows that students from Asian backgrounds are disproportionately successful in schooling, particularly those from East and South Asian family backgrounds. For example, Australian students from East Asian backgrounds have outperformed their native-English-speaking Australian peers in the OECD’s Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA). According to Jerrim (2015), the gap between the two groups is approximately 100 test points, equivalent to two and a half years of schooling. The test results of students from East Asian backgrounds have improved despite overall Australian PISA scores declining since 2003 (Jerrim 2015: 312).

Students from Asian backgrounds often do particularly well in standardised Year 12 examinations. In both NSW and Victoria, approximately 5 per cent of residents are of Chinese ancestry (ABS 2016 Census). However, in 2016, students with Chinese surnames comprised nearly a quarter (24 per cent) of the ‘all round achievers’ in NSW’s High School Certificate (HSC) (calculated from NESA 2016)¹. ‘All round achievers’ are those who have achieved results in the top band possible for all HSC subjects studied. In Victoria, 14 per cent of students on the 2017 Victorian Certificate of Education (VCE) High Achievers list – those attaining a score of 40 or more in a VCE study – have Chinese surnames (calculated from VCAA 2017). In post-secondary education, Dobson and Birrell (2005) show that Asian-Australians are disproportionately enrolled in elite health courses at university, particularly in dentistry and optometry, and to a lesser extent, medicine.

The success of LBOTE students from Asian backgrounds is also evident in their disproportionately high representation in of selective schools in NSW and Victoria. Selective schools are public schools catering for high achieving students. NSW has a total of 47 fully and partially selective schools, while Victoria has four.

As Table 1 shows, on average, 83 per cent of students in Sydney’s fully selective schools are from a LBOTE. In seven selective schools, more than 90 per cent of students are from a LBOTE, and in all but two cases, students from a LBOTE make up the majority of enrolments.

Table 1: Percentage of students from a language background other than English, Sydney selective schools, 2017

School	LBOTE %
James Ruse Agricultural High School	97
Baulkham Hills High School	94
Girraween High School	93
North Sydney Girls High School	93
Sydney Technical High School	93
North Sydney Boys High School	92
St George Girls High School	92
Sydney Boys High School	90

¹ This was a manual count of names that were clearly Chinese. We note that a Chinese surname does not necessarily imply that a student self-identifies as Chinese, or that they speak a Chinese language.

Sydney Girls High School	88
Hornsby Girls High School	86
Normanhurst Boys High School	86
Hurlstone Agricultural High School	84
Penrith High School	85
Fort Street High School	78
Conservatorium High School	69
Caringbah High School	45
Northern Beaches Secondary College Manly	41
AVERAGE	83

Source: *My School* 2017

Similarly, in Melbourne LBOTE students form the majority in selective schools, as shown in Table 1.

Table 2: Percentage of students from a language background other than English, Melbourne selective schools, 2017

School	LBOTE %
MacRobertson Girls High School	88
Suzanne Cory High School	88
Nossal High School	85
Melbourne High School	80
AVERAGE	85

Source: *My School* 2017

The majority of selective school students are from Asian ethnic backgrounds, particularly Chinese, and other East Asian and South Asian backgrounds, including Korean and Indian. The combination of data on ethnicity and socio-educational advantage suggests that the majority of selective school students are now children of highly advantaged, non-Anglo-Celtic migrant families.

Before the 1990s, selective school enrolments were primarily made up of Anglo-Australian students (Kalantzis and Cope 1988). Since the 1990s, the proportion of children of educated skilled migrants have increased in selective schools. The skill stream accounted for 68 per cent of the 2017-18 migration program, with 66 per cent of primary visa holders being professionals and 9 per cent managers (DHA 2018: 3). The top two occupations in 2017-18 were accountants and software engineers (DHA 2018: 15). Of the ten largest source countries in 2017-18, seven were Asian countries, with India and China topping the list (DHA 2018: 6).

As Table 3 shows, migrants born in China and India are much more likely to hold a university degree, and to be employed in professional and managerial jobs, compared to the Australian national average.

Table 3: Migrants born in China and India, 2016

	China-born	India-born	Total Australian population
Holds a university degree	46%	59%	26%
Employed as professional or manager	43%	42%	36%

Source: ABS Census 2016. Figures compiled from ABS TableBuilder

What the statistics don't tell us is *why* these educated migrant families are so enthusiastic about selective schools. After all, many could comfortably afford to send their children to prestigious private schools. More research is required in this area. It may be partly explained by evolving education cultures within Asian migrant communities in cities like Sydney, where gaining a selective school place has become a symbol of success, to an unprecedented degree. At the same time, there is evidence that the 'Asianisation' of selective schools has created a backlash from Anglo-Australian families, who no longer wish to send their children to schools they perceive as academic 'hothouses' and where their children would be part of an ethnic minority (see Ho 2017; Ho 2016).

HIGH LBOTE SCHOOLS AND DISADVANTAGE

Despite the stereotype of the successful migrant student, *My School* data show that the schools with the highest proportions of LBOTE students in NSW are located in the disadvantaged suburbs.² *My School* shows that Sydney has 125 schools where more than 90 per cent of students are from a LBOTE. These schools are concentrated in western and south-western Sydney.

High LBOTE schools tend to be disadvantaged schools, according to their Index of Community Socio-educational Advantage (ICSEA), as reported on the *My School* website.³ Among the 125 schools where LBOTE students comprise 90 per cent or more of enrolments, the median ICSEA score is 992. This is substantially lower than the median ICSEA for metropolitan Sydney, which is 1054. More than three quarters of these high LBOTE schools (76 per cent) are public schools.

The 125 high LBOTE schools are all below average in terms of academic performance, as measured by NAPLAN. Using a NAPLAN Index that equally weights literacy and numeracy results (Shepherd and Bonnor 2014), we can examine the performance of these schools. In metropolitan Sydney, overall NAPLAN Index scores range from 419 to 714, with a median score of 518. Among these high LBOTE schools, the median is 497. Excluding the fully selective schools, the median NAPLAN Index figure drops to 493.

Which areas host the schools with the highest proportion of LBOTE students? Table 4 shows the postcodes that have schools where the median LBOTE is over 90%, and also shows the ICSEA and NAPLAN figures for the schools.

Table 4: LBOTE, ICSEA and NAPLAN results by postcode

Postcode	Median LBOTE %	Median ICSEA	Median NAPLAN Index	Postcode LBOTE %
2195 (Lakemba/Wiley Park)	97	993	489	81
2144 (Auburn)	97	988	504	84
2166 (Cabramatta/ Canley Vale)	94	931	494	82
2200 (Bankstown)	92	987	481	76
2142 (Granville)	91	962	473	70
2165 (Fairfield)	91	930	485	78

Sources: *My School* 2016, Census 2016

² The next three sections refer to Greater Sydney only, in order to achieve the level of detail necessary to discern local patterns. The analysis may not reflect the experience of other Australian states or cities.

³ ICSEA scores reflect parental education and occupation, the geographical location of the school and proportion of Indigenous students (ACARA 2017).

As indicated in the final column, in each postcode, the schools have a higher LBOTE score than the communities in which they are located. While residents of these postcodes tend to be from LBOTE, this is even more the case in the local schools. This gap between the ethnic profiles of schools and their local communities is explored further below.

In every one of these postcodes, local schools are overwhelmingly comprised of LBOTE students, and in each postcode's schools, median ICSEA and NAPLAN scores are below average. Schools in Fairfield and Cabramatta/Canley Vale, for example, are in the bottom 10 per cent of ICSEA scores for metropolitan Sydney.

In addition to socio-educational disadvantage, many students in the postcodes above are part of ethnic communities that have been targets of racism and discrimination in Australia for many years. In particular, Arabic-speakers are prominent in most of these postcodes, comprising almost a quarter (23%) of residents in Bankstown (postcode 2200) and 19% of residents in Granville (postcode 2142), for example. Given the relatively young age profile of Arabic-speaking Australians, these figures likely under-represent the percentages of *young* residents from Arabic-speaking backgrounds.

The Scanlon Foundation (Markus 2017: 56) found in 2017 that a quarter (25%) of Australians had negative feelings towards immigrants from the Middle East, a higher figure than for any other ethnic group. Meanwhile, 34% of Australian Muslims reported experiencing discrimination (Markus 2017: 60). This mirrors decades of research documenting the racism directed at Arab and Muslim Australians after the 1991 Gulf War, and again after 9/11 and the 'War on Terror' (AHRC 2004; Collins et al 2000; Poynting et al 2004).

Scholars of education and ethnicity have regularly noted that the educational achievement of ethnic minority students is associated with how they are perceived and treated by the broader community. This 'cultural systems approach' (Suliman 2017) theorises that students who feel stigmatised by society internalise values, perceptions and social behaviours that can lead to educational failure. In Poynting et al's research, young Arabic-speaking men expressed resentment at being labelled 'dumb Lebs' but then used this concept themselves, with one interviewee stating, 'Lebanese doesn't excel as much in the academic areas...Lebanese are not capable at all' (Poynting et al 1999: 66). In response to stereotypes of Arab and Muslim Australians as criminals and terrorists, and accusations that their cultural values are incompatible with 'Australian values', Arabic-speaking youth can develop an oppositional mentality. In particular, young men often develop a 'protest masculinity' that is not conducive to educational success (Poynting et al 1999).

Arabic-speaking families in western Sydney often arrived in Australia as a result of war or conflict in the Middle East. Many had experienced disrupted education and employment, and arrived in Australia at a time of economic restructuring in the 1980s, meaning higher than average rates of unemployment in traditional working-class jobs in western Sydney. This turbulent history has not provided a good foundation for children's education. Not surprisingly then, Arabic-speaking students, particularly those with Lebanese backgrounds, tend to achieve lower test results and feel less supported by parents than other groups (Suliman and McInerney 2006).

Overall, this evidence suggests that in Sydney, outside of the selective school system, schools primarily comprised of ethnic minority students are likely to be under-performing disadvantaged schools.

ANGLO-DOMINATED SCHOOLS AND ADVANTAGE

In contrast, Sydney's 'whitest' schools tend to be highly advantaged. This section examines the Sydney schools with the lowest proportions of students from a LBOTE. Overall, Sydney has 99 schools with a LBOTE score of 10 per cent or under. In other words, these schools are overwhelmingly comprised of students from English-speaking backgrounds. These 99 schools are either non-government schools in the wealthiest suburbs, namely on the North Shore and Eastern Suburbs, or government schools located on the outer fringe of Sydney. The second group of schools are located in Anglo-Australian dominated communities in often semi-rural areas, such as Richmond, Windsor and Camden. However, the schools on the North Shore and Eastern suburbs are located in often very multicultural suburbs, suggesting perhaps that many Anglo-Australian students are travelling from other areas to attend these private schools, and also that local migrant families are avoiding these schools.

Among these 99 lowest LBOTE schools, the median ICSEA score is 1074, substantially higher than the Sydney-wide average of 1054. Non-government schools have an even higher median ICSEA score of 1108. Among the non-government schools, 44 per cent of families come from the highest quarter of socio-educational advantage, and only 3 per cent come from the lowest quarter. These schools are primarily comprised of students from highly advantaged, English-speaking backgrounds. Their performance in NAPLAN tests, with a median score of 532 in the NAPLAN Index, is well above the national average of 500.

This analysis mirrors that of the Bankwest Curtin Economics Centre that found that nine out of the ten most educationally advantaged areas in Australia are located in Sydney's North Shore or Eastern Suburbs (in addition to Camberwell in Victoria) (BCEC 2017: 70).

A local case of the wealthy harbour-side North Sydney/Kirribilli area illustrates these patterns. In these two suburbs, just over half (53 per cent) of residents were born overseas, and 28 per cent speak a non-English language at home. Eight per cent are of Chinese ancestry (ABS 2016 Census). Yet, the seven private schools in this area have a median LBOTE figure of just 11 per cent. These schools are much less culturally diverse than the suburbs in which they are located. In contrast, in the one public school in the area, 46 per cent of students are from a LBOTE. While students from ethnic minorities are over-represented in public schools, they are under-represented in private schools. This is a pattern that is replicated in many middle-class areas of Sydney, as explored further below.

In summary, looking at the extreme ends of the spectrum, there is a clear association between ethnicity and socio-educational advantage. On the one hand, the schools with the highest proportions of ethnic minority students tend to be disadvantaged and under-performing, with the notable exception of selective schools, while schools with the highest proportion of students from English-speaking backgrounds are advantaged and over-performing.

While these inequalities reflect broader societal inequalities relating to social class, ethnicity, migration and geography, policies encouraging school choice have exacerbated existing inequalities. As the next section shows, school choice has worsened ethnic divisions between schools and school sectors.

SCHOOL CHOICE; SEEKING ‘PEOPLE LIKE US’

Public policies encouraging school choice have enabled families to seek out schools providing the ‘right’ kind of student cohort. International research shows that for many families, finding a desirable student cohort is just as, if not more, important than the quality of teaching offered by the school (Kelly 2009). For some, a desirable cohort means avoiding students from different cultural backgrounds. Jakubowicz (2009: 4) argues that avoidance of cultural or religious difference ultimately ‘represents a withdrawal from intercultural interaction’. As a result of school choice, he suggests that by the mid-2000s, ‘some of the great tradition of public education as the beachhead for intercultural engagement had begun to come unstuck’ (Jakubowicz 2009: 4; see also Ho 2015; Ho et al 2015; Vincent et al 2017).

The Australian situation mirrors that of many other countries, where school choice has led to greater ethnic segregation (Blackmore 2006; Cucchiara 2013; Holme 2002; Kelly 2009; Reay et al 2007; Saporito 2003). In the United States, levels of segregation declined until the 1980s, and have risen again since the 1990s (Frankenberg et al 2003). Frankenberg et al (2003) report that the average white student attends a school that is 80 per cent white, while the largest city school systems are almost exclusively non-white. While school composition often reflects the composition of the surrounding community, even in ethnically diverse areas, school choice policies have tended to distort the ethnic diversity of schools (Burgess et al 2005; Rangvid 2007).

This is concerning because schools have a vital role to play in strengthening social cohesion and inter-cultural understanding. For example, in the United Kingdom, the lack of diversity within school populations was partly blamed for the 2001 riots in Bradford, Oldham and Burnley (Burgess and Wilson 2005). In the aftermath of the riots, Kundnani (2001: 107) explained that:

In some districts, school catchment areas contained near 100 per cent populations of just one ethnic group. In others, where catchment areas ought to have produced mixed intakes, the mechanism of parental choice allowed white parents to send their children to majority-white schools a little further away.

In Australia, strengthening social cohesion and cultural understanding have long been goals of schooling. As Tony Vinson commented, while chairing the Inquiry into the Provision of Public Education in NSW in 2002, public education has ‘aspired to be a force for social cohesion, for building mutual understanding between people of different ethnic, religious, vocational and socioeconomic backgrounds’. Vinson stated that this has contributed to the ‘peaceful co-existence of different groups and the maintenance of social arrangements and communal services that help to preserve the dignity of all Australians’, adding that ‘The challenges of the present era (such as growing sectarianism) make its preservation doubly important’ (cited in Wilkinson et al 2004: 19). These aspirations are shared by the vast majority of Australians. A 2004 Newspoll found that an overwhelming 96 per cent of Australians agreed that ‘it is good for children of different ethnic and religious backgrounds to mix at school’ (Wilkinson et al 2004: ix).

A survey conducted by the NSW Secondary Principals Council in 2006 raised concerns about ‘white flight’⁴ undermining the public education system and threatening social cohesion. The report showed the percentage of Anglo-European students in public schools had decreased by 42 per cent in North Sydney and by a third or more in parts of rural and regional NSW (Topsfield 2008).

⁴ It should be noted that ‘white flight’ is a contentious and – as our data show – misleading term when the ethnic pattern is examined in its full complexity.

Ethnic divides in our schools are perhaps most visible when we compare government and non-government schools. Overall, government schools educate more LBOTE students than non-government schools. In metropolitan Sydney, 55 per cent of students in government schools are from a LBOTE, compared to 31 per cent of students in non-government schools (*My School 2016*). In middle-class areas, this gap tends to be wider, presumably because families in these areas can afford private school fees, which give them greater choice. As Table 5 shows, in the Eastern Suburbs and North Shore, LBOTE figures in government schools are more than double those in non-government schools.

Table 5: LBOTE % in government and non-government schools, by region, Sydney

Region	Government schools median LBOTE %	Non-government schools median LBOTE %
Eastern suburbs	43	20
North Shore	34	16
Inner West	44	47
Hills District	45	26
Western corridor ⁵	75	65
Outer West ⁶	32	35
South West	79	70
St George	81	63
Sutherland Shire	18	16

Source: Calculated from *My School 2016*

This is not surprising given that decades of international research has shown that school choice is not exercised evenly by parents. Educated middle-class parents have the means and are much more likely to invest the time and resources into investigating different school options, preparing their children to meet entry requirements of selective and/or private schools, or making residential decisions based on school locations. The middle-class drift to private education is usually seen in terms of parental demand for ‘quality education’, in which private schools are viewed as more disciplined, values-based, and better resourced than public schools (Halse 2004). However, the ethnic divisions between public and private schools indicate that the cultural composition of schools is also an important factor. As a result of school choice policies, schools are less likely to reflect the demographic makeup of their local neighbourhoods, as the next section explains.

⁵ Homebush to Blacktown.

⁶ Blacktown to Emu Plains.

DO OUR SCHOOLS REFLECT THEIR NEIGHBOURHOODS? COMPARING SCHOOL AND LOCAL COMMUNITIES

School composition to a large extent reflects the make-up of the local community. However, some schools are not as ethnically diverse as the neighbourhoods in which they are located, while others are more diverse. International research shows that education systems with choice have schools with 'higher levels of economic, ethnic, and ability segregation than the levels in the neighbourhoods in which children reside' (Keels et al 2013: 242; see also Burgess et al 2005; Johnston et al 2006; Rangvid 2007).

Comparing the ethnic profiles of school and local communities in Sydney reveals some clear patterns. Schools with a greater number of ethnic minorities than their suburbs tend to be either located in the Western Suburbs, or are selective schools. Meanwhile, schools that are less culturally diverse than their suburbs tend to be private independent schools.

Excluding bilingual or language schools, there are 89 schools in Sydney where the LBOTE score of the school is at least 30 percentage points higher than the LBOTE score of the suburb. This means that the schools are substantially more culturally diverse than the suburbs in which they are located. Almost half of these schools (49 per cent, or 44 schools) are located in Western Sydney. A small number of these Western Sydney schools (9 out of 44) are minority religious schools, namely Islamic or Coptic Orthodox. Most, however, are public schools in which students from a LBOTE comprise the vast majority of enrolments; on average, 80 per cent. Meanwhile the suburbs in which they are located are on average 46 per cent LBOTE. For example, in the Wentworthville area (postcode 2145), 60 per cent of residents are from a LBOTE. However, in five of the local public schools, students from a LBOTE comprise more than 90 per cent of enrolments. This could suggest that Anglo-Australian families in this area are avoiding their local public schools.

Another notable subgroup within these 89 schools are selective schools, which comprise 15 per cent of the group. As a group, these schools have the largest gaps between school and suburb LBOTE figures, with an average difference of 52 percentage points. For example, while North Sydney Girls and North Sydney Boys High Schools have LBOTE figures of 93 per cent and 92 per cent respectively, only 34 per cent of local residents are from a LBOTE. This reflects the numbers of children of recent Asian migrants in these high achieving schools, as discussed above. These selective schools have entirely ceased acting as local schools, as they have no catchment zone, but rather admit students from across the state through a centralised testing regime.

At the other end of the spectrum, there are schools that are much less culturally diverse than the suburbs in which they are located. There are 32 schools in Sydney whose LBOTE figure is at least 30 percentage points lower than the LBOTE figure for the suburb. These schools are found across metropolitan Sydney, though notably, a quarter are located in the inner-city.

The majority (65 per cent) of these schools are independent schools. Given the substantial fees charged by most independent schools, this suggests that higher income, native English-speaking families are largely responsible for creating school communities that are less culturally diverse than the neighbourhoods in which they are located. This partly reflects the history of these schools. They were designed to serve the better off from a wider area. The schools' neighbourhoods have since changed. This pattern aligns with the evidence presented in the previous section relating to wealthy suburbs housing the biggest LBOTE gaps between public and private schools. In the case of these middle-class families, their choice is to send their children to schools largely populated by children from higher income native English-speaking backgrounds.

CONCLUSION

Decades of mass migration to Australia have changed the face of our schools. This report has examined two ways in which these changes have been felt. Firstly, the educational achievements of students from a language background other than English have added new layers of complexity to our education system. At one end, children of recent Asian migrants have often done exceptionally well in school, and are now over-represented in enrolments in high achieving selective schools, and are found in disproportionate numbers on Year 12 honour lists. At the other end of the spectrum, the schools with the highest proportions of LBOTE students tend to be disadvantaged and under-performing, while the schools with the lowest proportions of LBOTE students tend to be highly advantaged non-government schools performing at above average levels.

Secondly, while Australian society has become increasingly multicultural, cultural diversity is unevenly distributed in our schools. Typically, the ethnic diversity of schools does not reflect the diversity of the surrounding neighbourhood. Policies encouraging school choice have enabled many families to bypass their local school and enrol in another school with a more 'desirable' student cohort. This is particularly the case in middle-class areas, where parents have the resources to exercise school choice. Ethnic imbalances are perhaps most pronounced when comparing government and non-government schools.

As a nation built by immigration, schools have an important role to play in integrating new arrivals and socialising young people for life in a multicultural society. While Australians generally value schools' capacity to foster social cohesion and inter-cultural understanding, policies promoting school choice have led to greater division in our education system. When schools no longer reflect their local communities, students miss out on opportunities to develop inter-cultural competencies and understanding. Moreover, many students from a LBOTE are concentrated in disadvantaged, under-performing schools. Selective school students are a notable exception. This sizeable variation of both enrolments and educational outcomes adds to the growing inequalities confronting our education system. These inequalities and divisions are a challenge for schools, and in a multicultural society and globalising world, will have far ranging consequences.

This report is the fourth in the series, *In A Class of Their Own*. All reports have examined the forms of separation and inequality that are increasingly dividing schools and their students. The focus here has been on ethnicity, but there are many parallels with other forms of inequality, based on socio-economic status, location and other factors. In fact, the data in this report show that ethnicity intersects with socio-economic status to produce patterns of separation and inequality. Education policy must not just cater for the high-achieving migrant students, but also support those who continue to face disadvantage, and ultimately, work towards creating a less divided education system.

REFERENCES

- ACARA (2017). 'What does the ICSEA value mean?'
https://acaraweb.blob.core.windows.net/resources/About_icsea_2014.pdf
- AHRC (Australian Human Rights Commission) (2004). *Isma–Listen: National Consultations on Eliminating Prejudice Against Arab and Muslim Australians*, Australian Government Publishing Service Canberra.
- Bankwest Curtin Economics Centre (2017). *Educate Australia Fair? Education Inequality in Australia*, Bankwest and Curtin University.
- Birrell, R. (1986). 'The educational achievement of non-English speaking background students and the politics of the community languages movement', in L. Baker & P. Miller (Eds) *The Economics of Immigration*, Canberra, Australian Govt. Pub. Service, Australian National University.
- Birrell, R. (1987). 'The educational achievement of non-English speaking background students and the politics of the community languages movement'. *The Economics of Immigration: Proceedings of a conference at the Australian National University 22-23 April 1987*. L. Baker and P. Miller. Canberra, Australian Government Publishing Service.
- Birrell, R. and S. E. Khoo (1995). *The Second Generation in Australia: Educational and Occupational Characteristics*. Canberra, Bureau of Immigration, Multicultural and Population Research.
- Blackmore, J. (2006). Deconstructing Diversity Discourses in the Field of Educational Management and Leadership. *Educational Management Administration and Leadership* 34(2): 181-199.
- Bullivant, B. M. (1988). The ethnic success ethic: Ubiquitous phenomenon in English-speaking societies? *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 11(1): 63-84.
- Burgess, S., et al. (2005). 'Parallel lives? Ethnic segregation in schools and neighbourhoods', *Urban Studies*, 42(7): 1027-1056.
- Cahill, D. and A. Gundert (1996). *Immigration and Schooling in the 1990s* Canberra, Australian Govt. Pub. Service.
- Chesters, J. and A. Daly (2017). Do peer effects mediate the association between family socio-economic status and educational achievement? *Australian Journal of Social Issues* 52: 63-77.
- Collins, J., et al. (2000). *Kebabs, kids, cops and crime: Youth, ethnicity and crime*. Sydney, Pluto Press.
- Considine, G. and G. Zappalà (2002). The influence of social and economic disadvantage in the academic performance of school students in Australia. *Journal of Sociology* 38(2): 129-148.
- Creagh, S. (2014). A critical analysis of problems with the LBOTE category on the NAPLAN test. *Australian Educational Researcher* 41(1): 1-23.
- Creagh, S. (2016). 'A critical analysis of the Language Background Other Than English (LBOTE) category in the Australian national testing system: A Foucauldian perspective', *Journal of Education Policy* 31(3): 275-289.
- Cucchiara, M. (2013). 'Are We Doing Damage?' Choosing an Urban Public School in an Era of Parental Anxiety. *Anthropology and Education Quarterly* 44(1): 75-93.
- DHA (Department of Home Affairs) (2018). *2017-18 Migration Program Report*,
https://migrationalliance.com.au/images/easyblog_images/278/2-17-2018-Migration-Program-Report.pdf

- Dobson, I., Birrell, R. & Rapson, V. (1996). 'The participation of non-English-speaking background persons in higher education', *People and Place* 4(1): 46-54
- Frankenberg, E., et al. (2003). *A Multiracial Society with Segregated Schools: Are We Losing the Dream?*, Civil Rights Project, Harvard University.
- Gleeson, A. (2016). 'NAPLAN: Migrant students are outclassing Aussie kids in literacy and numeracy', *The Daily Telegraph* December 13, <http://www.dailytelegraph.com.au/news/nsw/naplan-migrant-students-are-outclassing-aussie-kids-in-literacy-and-numeracy/news-story/ca5260a9f89458dfc835725cff3a05fe>
- Halse, C. (2004). Striving for balance: Australian perspectives on the future of schooling. *International Journal of Educational Research* 41(7-8): 523-533.
- Ho, C. (2015). 'People like us': School choice, multiculturalism and segregation in Sydney, *Australian Review of Public Affairs*, August.
- Ho, C. (2016). 'Hothoused and hyper-racialised: The ethnic imbalance in our selective schools', *The Guardian*, October 27, <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2016/oct/27/hothoused-and-hyper-racialised-the-ethnic-imbalance-in-our-selective-schools>
- Ho, C. (2017). Angry Anglos and aspirational Asians: everyday multiculturalism in the selective school system in Sydney. *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education*, pp.1-16. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01596306.2017.1396961>
- Ho, C., Vincent, E. & Butler, R. (2015). 'Everyday and Cosmo-Multiculturalisms: Doing Diversity in Gentrifying School Communities', *Journal of Intercultural Studies*, 36(6): 658-675.
- Ho, C. et al (2018). 'Institutionalised Separation: The impact of selective schools', *The Centre for Policy Development*, <https://cpd.org.au/2018/07/institutionalised-separation/>
- Holme, J. J. (2002). Buying Homes, Buying Schools: School Choice and the Social Construction of School Quality. *Harvard Educational Review* 72(2): 177-205.
- Jakubowicz, A. (2009). *Cultural Diversity, Cosmopolitan Citizenship and Education: Issues, Options and Implications for Australia: A discussion paper for the Australian Education Union, Sydney.*
- Jerrim, J. (2015). Why do East Asian children perform so well in PISA? An investigation of Western-born children of East Asian descent. *Oxford Review of Education* 41(3): 310-333.
- Johnston, R., et al. (2006). 'School and residential segregation: An analysis of variations across England's Local Education Authorities'. *Regional Studies*, 40(9): 973-990.
- Kalantzis, M. and B. Cope (1988). Why we need multicultural education: A review of the 'ethnic disadvantage' debate. *Journal of Intercultural Studies* 9(1): 39-57.
- Keels, M., Burdick-Will, J., and Keene, S., (2013). 'The effects of gentrification on neighborhood public schools', *City and Community*, 12 (3), 238-259.
- Kelly, A. (2009). Juxtaposing some contradictory findings from research on school choice. *Magis: Revista Internacional de Investigacion en Educacion* 2(3): 261-274.
- Kundnani, A. (2001). From Oldham to Bradford: The Violence of the Violated. *Race and Class* 43: 105-110.
- Lingard, B., et al. (2012). Education policy as numbers: Data categories and two Australian cases of misrecognition. *Journal of Education Policy* 27(3): 315-333.

- Marks, G. N. (2014). Demographic and socioeconomic inequalities in student achievement over the school career. *Australian Journal of Education* 58(3): 223-247.
- Marks, G. N. (2000). *Patterns of Participation in Year 12 and Higher Education in Australia: Trends and Issues*. Camberwell, Australian Council for Educational Research.
- Markus, A. (2017). *Mapping Social Cohesion: The Scanlon Foundation Surveys 2017*, Monash University, Caulfield East, http://scanlonfoundation.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2014/05/ScanlonFoundation_MappingSocialCohesion_2017.pdf
- Meade, P. et al (1983). 'The educational experience of Sydney high school students: A comparative study of migrant students of non-English-speaking origin and students whose parents were born in an English-speaking country', Report No. 3, Canberra, Australian Government Publishing Service.
- NSW DoE (Department of Education) 2018. 'Multicultural Education Policy', <https://education.nsw.gov.au/policy-library/policies/multicultural-education-policy>
- Poynting, G., et al. (1999). Intersections of masculinity and ethnicity: A study of male Lebanese immigrant youth in western Sydney. *Race, Ethnicity and Education* 2(1): 59-78.
- Poynting, S., et al. (2004). *Bin Laden in the suburbs: Criminalising the Arab other*. Sydney, Sydney Institute of Criminology.
- Rangvid, B. S., (2007). 'Living and learning separately? Ethnic segregation of school children in Copenhagen'. *Urban Studies*, 44 (7), 1329-1354.
- Reay, D., et al. (2007). 'A Darker Shade of Pale?' Whiteness, the Middle Classes and Multi-Ethnic Inner City Schooling. *Sociology* 41(6): 1041-1060.
- Rice, S. (2016). 'NAPLAN results reveal little change in literacy and numeracy performance – here are some key takeaway findings', *The Conversation* December 13, <https://theconversation.com/naplan-results-reveal-little-change-in-literacy-and-numeracy-performance-here-are-some-key-takeaway-findings-70208>
- Saporito, S. (2003). Private Choices, Public Consequences: Magnet School Choice and Segregation by Race and Poverty. *Social Problems* 50(2): 181-203.
- Shepherd, B. & Bonnor, C. (2014). *Equity in Australian Schooling: An Update*, Prepared for the "Need to Succeed" Symposium 23 October, <http://apo.org.au/system/files/41866/apo-nid41866-47061.pdf>
- Suliman, R. (2017). Young people from Arabic-speaking background, Western Sydney University Equity and Diversity. https://www.westernsydney.edu.au/equity_diversity/equity_and_diversity/cultural_diversity/past_event_s/conference_documents/young_people_from_arabic-speaking_background_-_part_1
- Suliman, R. and D. M. McInerney (2006). Motivational goals and school achievement: Lebanese-background students in south-western Sydney. *Australian Journal of Education* 50(3): 242-264.
- Topsfield, J. (2008). Push to tackle 'white flight'. *The Age*. 17 July.
- Tovey, J. (2013) 'NAPLAN: non-English language background students in year 7 come out tops in NSW', *The Sydney Morning Herald* December 13, <http://www.smh.com.au/national/education/naplan-nonenglish-language-background-students-in-year-7-come-out-tops-in-nsw-20131213-2zc1n.html>
- Vic DET (Department of Education and Training) 2018. 'EAL learners in mainstream schools', <https://www.education.vic.gov.au/school/teachers/support/diversity/eal/Pages/ealschools.aspx>

Vincent, E., Butler, R. & Ho, C. (2017) 'They try to avoid.' How do parents' feelings about ethnicised and classed differences shape gentrifying school communities? *Emotion, Space and Society*, 25: 29-36.

Watkins, M., Ho, C. & Butler, R. (2017). 'Asian migration and education cultures in the Anglo-sphere.' *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 43(14): 2283-2299

Wilkinson, D., et al. (2004). The Accountability of Private Schools to Public Values. The Australia Institute.

Windle, J. (2004). The Ethnic (Dis)advantage Debate Revisited: Turkish Background Students in Australia. *Journal of Intercultural Studies* 25(3): 271-286.