



**Consortium for Research on  
Educational Access,  
Transitions and Equity**

**Quality Low-Fee Private Schools for the Rural Poor:  
Perception or reality? Evidence from Southern Ghana**

**Luke Akaguri**

**CREATE PATHWAYS TO ACCESS  
Research Monograph No. 69**

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**University of Sussex  
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Consortium for Research on  
Educational Access, Transitions & Equity

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## **List of Acronyms**

CREATE	Consortium for Research into Educational Access, Transitions and Equity
CRT	Criterion Referenced Test
BECE	Basic Education Certificate of Examination
EFA	Education for All
EMIS	Education Management Information System
GES	Ghana Education Service
SHS	Senior High School
JHS	Junior High School
LFPSs	Low-Fee Private schools
PTR	Pupil Teacher Ratio
WAEC	West African Examinations Council

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## **Preface**

This monograph provides insights into the realities of private schooling in rural Ghana. Until the 1990s there were few private schools in the country, and those that there were charged high fees and met demand from affluent parents who were mostly urban. Liberalisation created opportunities for businessman and communities to invests in setting up low fee schools. These have grown in number and are to be found in many of the more developed rural areas. They have many different forms covering a spectrum from the purely commercially to the more philanthropic and the faith based. The demand that they meet appears to be predominantly from parents who perceive that public schools have deteriorated, and have fallen in quality and capability. Some studies have shown that some private schools out perform public schools despite having less qualified teachers and poorer infrastructure. Absenteeism is generally less in the private schools since teachers are generally paid for what they deliver, and pupils risk losing the benefits of what they have paid for if they truant.

This paper adds to the landscape of insights into the growth and practice of low fee private schools in rural Ghana. Generally private schooling is seen to be superior to public schooling, though the evidence on this, at least in terms of academic performance, is mixed. It seems likely that the differences between the two categories of school are less than the differences within each category. And that if it were possible to control for characteristics of those choosing private schools, who seem more likely to be richer, have high aspirations for their children, and more interested in their progress, then school type effects may not be definitive.

Other CREATE research has shown that low fee private providers rarely create access for those with none. Rather they substitute a fee paying service for fee free public schooling on the basis that they offer greater quality and more chance of passing selection examinations. In some places this has led to strong stratification with those in the top two or three quintiles of household income attending private schools, leaving the public system to the poorest. Public systems remain the provider of last resort since private operators are generally unwilling and or unable to provide services to those with few assets and little income. The paper rightly concludes that the challenge is not to find better ways of supporting low fee private schools of mixed provenance, but to invest in improving the performance and quality of the public schools. This could slow the growing inequalities that are beginning to shape a new stratification in society in Ghana that increasingly excludes those without the means to afford private fee paying schooling.

Keith Lewin  
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## **Summary**

The main argument used in explaining the increasing popularity of private schooling in an era of fee-free public education in developing countries relates to the perception of better quality education in the private sector. In Ghana, however, to the extent that it exists, the evidence for better quality is derived mainly from schools located in urban or peri-urban settings. As a result, little is known about the relative quality of public and private schools in poor rural areas. Using primary data derived from questionnaires and interviews and secondary data on BECE (Basic Education Certificate Examination) results, this paper contributes to the school choice debate by examining the school inputs and outcomes (exam/test results) of public and low-fee private schools in poor rural areas of Mfantseman district in southern Ghana. The paper argues that while the quality of private schools in urban settings may often be better than public schools in similar environments, at least in terms of measured outcomes, the same is not the case for the sampled schools in poor rural Mfantseman. It further contends that the simple perceptions of higher quality of low-fee private compared to public schools in rural settings are based on beliefs rather than realities. These perceptions, in addition to poor household heads' high aspirations for their children, fuel interest in private education. The paper suggests that for public schools to redeem their image the GES (Ghana Education Service) should consider working to make rural public schools more responsive and accountable to the communities they serve.



# Quality Low-Fee Private Schools for the Rural Poor: Perception or reality? Evidence from Southern Ghana

## 1. Introduction

The global agenda of achieving education for all (EFA) by 2015 has led many developing countries to formulate and implement fee-free educational policies. In Ghana, the abolition of tuition fees and the introduction of the Capitation Grant Initiative in 2005 resulted in a massive increase in enrolment (18%) in public basic schools (MOESS, 2006). Since the extension of fee-free schooling to all children requires massive investment by the state, the quality of basic education is a serious concern in relation to the rationale for such investment. Accordingly, it may be argued that the extent to which pupils master basic skills in literacy and numeracy may be a more relevant way of judging schools' performance than quantitative targets such as the total number of children enrolled (see Lassibille and Tan (2003)). This is partly because there is evidence that a substantial proportion of enrolment which has followed the introduction of fee-free schooling in developing countries has not been sustained in terms of progression through the basic cycle (Lewin, 2011). Estimates for Ghana, for example, show that over 20% of children leave school before the completion of the basic cycle, due to factors including the low quality public education (MOESS, 2006).

In some quarters, the suggestion that privatisation of basic education service delivery in developing countries can play a role in the achievement of education for all is gaining currency (Tooley, 2005; Tooley and Dixon, 2007). This is based on the argument that private education provision could improve quality and efficiency in service delivery including through the mechanisms of choice and competition, which in turn, some argue, may make schools innovative and responsive and more significantly, could improve the academic achievement of pupils (Lubienski, 2008; Tooley, 2009). However, there are many issues to resolve, not least, the barrier that choice is only available to those that can pay, and that competition is only effective if there are alternative sources of schooling within reach of households.

Many studies of private schooling in developing countries have shown that private schools perform better than public schools in particular contexts (Kingdon, 1996; Tooley, 2005; 2009, GSS, 2005). Tooley and Dixon's (2007) studies of private schools serving the needs of the poor in Africa and Asia found that after controlling for the background characteristics of children, private schools were of better quality than public schools. Evidence also suggests that the perception of deteriorating quality of publicly provided education has encouraged the increase in private schooling in poor areas of many developing countries (Gulosino and Tooley, 2002; Tooley, 2005).

However, this study hypothesises that no difference exists between the quality of public and low-fee private schools (LFPSs) in poor rural areas. This paper is written for the Consortium for Research on Educational Access, Transitions and Equity (CREATE), which takes a broad view of access<sup>1</sup> to include provision of meaningful opportunities for learning in terms of

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<sup>1</sup> CREATE conceptualises full access or meaningful access as secure enrolment and regular school attendance, progression in school at appropriate age, learning which has utility, reasonable chance of transiting to lower secondary and finally, more equal opportunities to learning with less variations in the quality of schooling for children from poor households (Lewin, 2007:21)

educational quality for children from poor households (Lewin, 2007). It examines the variations in quality of publicly and privately provided basic education in rural Mfantseman with a view to addressing the issue of equality and equity of opportunities for meaningful learning in that community.

Data from the Ghana MOESS (2006) suggests growth in the number of private schools in Ghana, with an estimated share on recent estimates of about 17% of total enrolment (Akyeampong, 2009). However, this percentage share appears to underestimate private schools' contribution to total enrolment, because unregistered private schools are not captured in the national data. For example, Tooley and Dixon (2007) estimate that in the poor Ga West District of Ghana, only 25% of the total 779 schools were public schools, enrolling about 36% of the total 161,244 pupils. The remaining schools (75%) were private unaided and unregistered (22.7%) and private registered and unaided (52.3%) absorbing 64% of the remaining students. Tooley and Dixon (2007) argue that poor quality public schooling has encouraged the growth of LFPSs (Low Fee Private Schools). Even though Ga West is not a typical rural community due to the district's proximity to Accra and therefore to better economic opportunities (Rose, 2007), the pattern of distribution of public and private schools in the area clearly shows a growing private sector.

A major reason advanced in support of the growth of these LFPSs in poor rural settings is their ability to produce better examination outcomes than their public school counterparts (Tooley, 2009; 2005; MOESS, 2006; GSS, 2005). In Ghana, the results of the Criterion Referenced Test (CRT), which is conducted by the Ghana Education Service (GES), and of the Basic Education Certificate Examination (BECE) conducted by the West African Examinations Council (WAEC) are often cited as evidence of quality (GSS, 2005). However, even though the CRT and BECE results of private schools have been consistently better than those of public schools (MOESS, 2006; GSS, 2005), many of the private schools that perform well in these examinations are located in urban or peri-urban settings and have selective entry policies and high fees. In addition, these urban private schools have high quality teachers due to the relatively high salaries they pay compared to teachers in the public sector. They also have good infrastructure and teaching and learning materials. As a result, private schools in urban settings are unsurprisingly more attractive to households willing and able to pay for their services (GSS, 2005; Addae-Mensah, 2000). Clearly, better performing private schools are associated with pupils from wealthier households which are also described by other forms of socio-economic advantage (Akyeampong, et. al., 2007).

By contrast with the urban private schools, the LFPSs in rural areas pay relatively low salaries when compared to their public schools counterparts (Tooley and Dixon, 2007). The LFPSs in rural Ghana do not have high quality inputs such as trained teachers, adequate teaching and learning materials or good infrastructure, even when compared to public schools in a similar environment. In some cases, low-fee private schools are satellites of urban private schools. In these cases, it is not clear whether parents fully differentiate between the performance of the urban private school and the rural satellite. Thus, a number of questions surround the issue of whether these LFPSs really provide quality education, as has been argued by proponents of private schooling such as Tooley (2009). Since little is known about the quality of public and private schools in poor rural environments, this paper contributes to the school choice debate by analysing the quality of public and private schools in poor rural areas in the Mfantseman district of Ghana. The paper argues that, while it is known that examination and test scores of high cost urban private schools are better than public schools in similar environments; the same is not the case for LFPSs in poor rural environments.

This paper is organised into six sections. Section one provides the introduction. Section two discusses the context of the case study district. Section three contextualises the theoretical debate on school choice and quality. Section four describes the data and methods. Section five discusses the results and section six provides conclusions.

## **2. Context of Mfantseman District**

Mfantseman District is located in the Central Region of Ghana and is one of 138 administrative districts in the country. It has a total population of 152,264 constituting about 7% of the total population of the region (GSS, 2005a). Even though it is not considered to be one of the 40 most economically deprived districts, it is located in the fourth poorest region of the country (GSS, 2000). Of the 12 administrative districts in the Central Region, Mfantseman district has been identified as one of the poorest, with about 60% of its total population considered to be living below the poverty line (GSS, 2007; MDA, 2006; GSS, 2000). The major economic activities are farming and fishing and around half (49.4%) of the adult population is engaged in agricultural occupations (GSS, 2005a). Farming activities are rain-fed and owing to the perennial erratic rainfall patterns and to low-yield farming practices, many farmers can only produce at the subsistence level. School attendance is relatively low. Gross enrolment at primary and junior high school levels stood at 70.1% and 67.6% respectively at the turn of the millennium (GSS, 2000). Only 37.9% of adults are literate in English and one Ghanaian language. About 33% of the total population have never enrolled in school, with 16.6% of those between the ages 6-14 years never having been to school. Compared to the other districts in the region, Mfantseman has the greatest proportion of school age children who have never enrolled (GSS, 2005a). Thus, this is a district which one could describe as poor, with its rural communities facing multiple deprivation, including unreliable sources of livelihood and poor access to education.

In terms of educational administration, the district has been divided into eight educational circuits: Saltpond, Mankessim, Eyisam, Yamoransa, Essarkyir, Dominase, Anomabo and Narkwa. Apart from Dominase Circuit, all the educational circuits adjoin the coast. In terms of the number of schools, available data indicate that there is a total of 294 public schools, including senior secondary and vocational schools. 113 private basic schools<sup>2</sup> are in the district (MDA, 2006). This makes the ratio of the number of public basic schools to private about 3:1 and gives an enrolment ratio of 5:1 public to private pupils. Since the number of private schools reported in MDA (2006) are those officially recognised, the ratio could be expected to decrease if all unregistered private schools were accounted for.

In short, as a rural district, Mfantseman is faced with economic and social deprivation (GSS, 2005b), with the extent of deprivation being severe among the rural communities of the interior which depend on seasonal subsistence farming and fishing. Narkwa and Dominase educational circuits are examples of such communities, which have relatively low ratios of public to low fee private schools. Even here, some poor households are making choices between these school types. Although these educational circuits are among the poorest in the district, the presence of low fee private schools in such an environment is a clear indication of the presence of demand.

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<sup>2</sup> Basic school refers to Grades 1 to 9

### **3. Contextualising the Theoretical Debate**

Household school choice decisions are influenced by a number of complex and interrelated individual and household factors. However, in choosing a school, a number of factors come into play and key among them is the households' consideration of the expected costs and benefits of education (Kitaev, 1999; Becker, 1981). In conditions of relative scarcity of household economic resources, the decision to invest in education, from an economic point of view, may be conceived as based on the extent to which the additional benefit of increased schooling, measured by the marginal returns to the household, are greater than or equal to the additional costs incurred, or the marginal cost (Becker, 1981; Psacharopolous & Woodhall, 1985; Shultz, 1988). In their study in Cambodia, Bray and Bunly (2005) argue that:

... when households undertake informal cost-benefit analyses to decide whether or not to send a child to school, they are in effect balancing other priorities against education. (Bray and Bunly, 2005:3)

One implication of this for the issue of public and private schooling is that, where households perceive the quality of fee-paying schooling to be very low, they may decide not to enrol their children or may look for alternative schooling, owing to a perception of likely low returns. In support of this phenomenon, some studies suggest that lower public school test scores in elementary schools increase the probability of parents choosing to enrol their children in private schools (Lankford and Wyckoff, 1992).

The decision to choose a particular school type may be influenced by actual and perceived school effectiveness, which is often judged in terms of the number of pupils that pass standardised tests; and there is sufficient evidence from developing countries such as India, Tanzania and Thailand to suggest that private schools sometimes perform better than public schools (Kindgon, 1996; Jimenez, et. al., 1991; and Cox and Jimenez, 1991). For example, Jimenez et. al. (1991), after controlling for measureable school characteristics, found that private schools' ability to adopt better management practices, including relating to teacher supervision and accountability to parents is significant in improving pupil performance. School quality influences the attitudes of the poor towards education. In the Philippines, Gulosino and Tooley (2002) found that the quality of schooling influenced household demand for a particular school type. Children who receive low quality schooling may become less productive in the labour market. They are also more likely to repeat grades in school, potentially increasing the cost of attaining a particular level of schooling (Mason and Rozelle, 1998).

Since school quality is one of the measures of 'productivity' effects of education, improvements in the quality of basic education could result in improved returns to schooling and higher educational attainment (Mason and Rozelle, 1998). Even though poor households might not make overt calculations of the costs and benefits of educational investments, some households may undertake what Bray and Bunly (2005:3) term an 'informal impressionistic analysis of the costs and the benefits'. For example, if households do not perceive that the quality of education available in their community would enable their children to go beyond a threshold of education with which they can secure employment to recoup their investment, they may be reluctant to invest in education. Studies in rural Ghana have shown that the demand for basic schooling is influenced by parents' perception of a school's quality and their children's chances of accessing post-basic education (Pryor and Ampiah, 2003; Lavy, 1996). Bray and Bunly (2005) have noted that in Cambodia, household costs of schooling for

children in poor remote rural areas are relatively greater than those in peri-urban and urban areas. As a result, if households perceive the quality of schooling to be low, they would have more reasons not to demand it, even if it is fee-free.

Further, studies have established a positive relationship between quality of education and household demand for schooling. In terms of improving quality, Glewwe and Jacoby (1994) found that repairing school buildings rather than investing in more instructional materials like books, desks and blackboards and teacher quality improve attainment in school more effectively in Ghana. Similarly, Glewwe (1999) found that repairing classrooms and the provision of textbooks improve cognitive achievement more than constructing more classrooms. In Cote d'Ivoire, Montgomery, et al. (1995) found that availability of textbooks in community primary schools leads to a significant improvement in educational attainment. Therefore, the availability of quality education inputs could be expected to significantly impact on demand for schooling among poor households (see Chao and Alper, 1998; Lloyd and Gage-Brandon, 1993).

The quality of schooling can also be linked to regular teacher attendance and children's time on task in the classroom. In Botswana, Dunne and Leach (2005) found that a key factor for low performing schools is low professionalism among teachers in such schools. Many schools have problems with teacher absenteeism, lateness and refusal to teach, even when in school. Moreover, even though pupils are generally expected to be engaged in learning during the entire time they are in the classroom, in reality time in the classroom is often not efficiently utilised due to poor teacher knowledge of the subject matter, inadequate teaching resources (Abadzi, 2009) and ineffective management (Akyeampong, et. al., 2007; Alhassan and Adzhalie-Mensah, 2010).

In the Gambia and Burkina Faso, Dia (2003) reported that a scarcity of textbooks leads teachers to spend considerable time writing lessons and problems on the board (Abadzi, 2009). Further, time-on-task while engaged in the prescribed curriculum is found to be a better predictor of learning outcomes than any learning activity in some studies (Vocknell, 2006: cited in Abadzi, 2009:274-276). In Ghana, an EARC (2003) report indicates that some teachers in rural schools do not follow the schools' prescribed teaching timetable. Earlier studies in Ghana have found that instructional time lost due to teacher absenteeism and lateness resulted in students being taught only two out of ten subjects in a day (Fobi, et al, 1999: cited in Akyeampong et. al., 2007). Time lost due to teacher absenteeism and lateness is typically a more common occurrence in rural than urban schools and this has implications for the quality of schools in those areas.

The costs of schooling can impact on a child's access to and performance in school. But for children from households with favourable socio-economic backgrounds, the costs of schooling may be less of a problem since household possession of social and physical capital positively impacts upon schooling outcomes (Goldring and Philips, 2008; Betts, 1999). In the United States, Coleman et al. (1966, cited in Betts 1999) found that the most significant determinant of student performance was family background, while the differences in school resources accounted for relatively little in terms of differences in performance. However in this sample, differences in school resources are smaller than those found in many developing countries (Betts, 1999). Reviews of research on the impact of schooling based on over 100 studies in developing countries have found little evidence that teacher-pupil ratios or teacher salaries within certain limits are positively and significantly associated with student performance (for example Hunushek, 1995). However, this study did find a significant



positive association between teachers' education, school facilities and student performance. What the evidence suggests is that, along with family background, school spending in developing countries might play a significant role in students' performance.

What is clear from the above discussion is that a number of factors influence household school choice decisions, but prominent among them are household socio-economic factors on the demand-side and the quality of schooling on the supply-side. The literature suggests that private schools are more effective, in terms of producing better test and exam results than public schools, although not all studies are able to fully control for background characteristics and to draw conclusions about 'value added'. This paper examines the issue in relation to schooling alternatives in the rural Mfantseman district of Ghana.

## **4. Data and Methods**

Data for this paper were collected from both primary and secondary sources. The primary data were collected from in-depth interviews with 38 household heads that have enrolled their children in public, private or both types of school (for different children) in the months of June to August, 2008. The aim of the interviews was to explore the considerations that inform household heads' school choice. The questions asked include why the household head chose the public/private school. Further, a questionnaire was administered to the head teachers of three public and three low-fee private schools in the study circuits and data were collected on their school inputs including teacher qualification and types of school building. Head teachers of LFPSs were also interviewed on the strategies they employ to improve their BECE results.

Secondly, pupils in 6 public primary and JHS (Junior High Schools) and 4 private primary and JHS in two rural educational circuits in the Mfantseman district were given the same standardised tests in English and mathematics, first in 2007 and then again in 2008. The difficulty level of the tests was set at Grade 3, but the tests were taken by primary school pupils in Grades 3 and 6 and JHS pupils in Grade 7. In addition, data on the background characteristics of children were collected. These included household literacy, private tuition outside the home, occupations of household members and whether household receives transfer payments (see Appendix 1). The secondary data employed are taken from national sources – the Education Management Information System (EMIS) from the GES and BECE results for schools in educationally deprived<sup>3</sup> districts of Ghana from 2005-2008, collected from WAEC. In addition, the BECE results of rural poor educational circuits hosting both public and low-fee private schools in Mfantseman were collected from the schools.

It is important to note that, each subject at the BECE is graded from 1 to 9. The lower the grade scores the better the results<sup>4</sup>. The total aggregate score required for selection into post basic education is based on the six best subjects out of a total of 10, including mathematics, English language and general science. The best result was found to be an aggregate of 6, while the worst was an aggregate of 59.

Three methods of analysis are employed. First, themes were derived from qualitative interviews and are discussed in relation to the research questions. The second strand of analysis employed descriptive statistics to examine the differences in examination performance. The student t-test was also used to determine whether examination performance between public and private schools in educationally deprived districts differed in a statistically significant way. Finally, the third strand employed regression of tests scores by on student background characteristics and school characteristics to determine the performance of schools in English and mathematics tests conducted in 2007 and progress made by children in schools in 2008. The full list of explanatory variables for regression analysis is shown in Appendix 1.

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<sup>3</sup> Education deprivation is based on a number of criteria set by the Ghana Education Service in 2000. These include percentage of children having desk, pupil teacher ratio, percentage of teachers untrained, availability of potable water, building made from cement block, etc.

<sup>4</sup> The West African Examinations Council grades each subject from 1 to 9 and the lower the grade score the better the results (Grade 1 is excellent, Grade 2 is very good, Grade 3 is good, Grade 4 is fairly good, Grade 6 is fair and Grade 9 is fail). Total aggregate score for selection into post basic education is based on six best subjects out of a total of 10 including mathematics, English language and General Science. Therefore, the best results would be aggregate 6, while the worst is aggregate 59.

## **5. Discussion of Results**

### **5.1 School Choice in Rural Mfantseman: What Reasons do Household Heads give for the Schooling they choose?**

The decision to send a child to school and to a particular type of school is complex due to the complexity of the range of considerations to be accounted for (Kitaev, 1999). This section explores the considerations informing household heads' school choice decisions in poor rural areas through interviews with household heads that have children in public schools only, private schools only and a mixture of both public and private schools.

When household heads were asked why they chose to enrol their children in public schools, they typically responded that they actually preferred private school but are unable to afford the costs. Of the 14 household heads that had enrolled their children in public schools only, 9 said they would have preferred private schools, due to their success in exams. Others said that they chose public schooling because the cost of private schooling is burdensome, sometimes adding, however, that even though children in private schools are more able to speak English, when it comes to writing, public schools do better. Some interviewees indicated that they chose public schools because of the good quality of teachers, adding that provided pupils in public schools take their lessons seriously, they could in principle make progress, but adding that often they do not because of poor professional practises such as absenteeism and inefficient use of teacher-pupil contact time by some public school teachers. It emerged that it was the interaction between the characteristics of the school and teachers, the child and the household that influenced the household's response to the choice of a school.

With respect to household heads that choose the combined school option (i.e. sending some children to private and some to public school), their explanation for their choice of private school was often that private schools do better in their final examinations when compared to public schools. It is the perception of examination success that appears to motivate them to enrol some of their children in private school. The following comment by a female household head illustrates this view:

The private schools do better than the public schools ... when we look at all the children that sit for the Junior High School (JHS) Certificate Exams, it is only the children from the private schools that pass the exam ... we know because we see the other children moving on to Senior High School (SHS). Even two of my own children who attended public school couldn't pass the JHS exam to enable them to continue to SHS.

The issue of examination results is crucial to household school choice decisions. This is because it is the examination results that determine whether the child can proceed to post basic education. When a household made different school choices for different children, it tended to be in order to create, at least in terms of perceptions, better opportunities for those who were enrolled in private school. Accordingly, a greater proportion of household resources were devoted to supporting children in private school, while those in public school received less support. As Goldring and Philips (2008), and Bosetti (2004) argue, having chosen a private school for their child, parents invest money and time in them in a bid to prove that they have made the right choice. What is clear from household heads were that, they did not enrol all their children in private school due to the relative high costs of enrolling all of them and also enrolling academically weaker child in private school amounted to wastage of household resources.

Household heads that choose private school only (for all their children) said that they wanted an education that enabled their children to read, write and communicate in English. Moreover, they wanted their children to be able to access post-basic education, citing children from other households in their communities who had successfully entered secondary school through private schooling. Interviewees argued that education should be able to yield tangible benefits and pointed out that what matters most about a school is whether learning takes place. Comparing public schools in the communities with the private schools, interviewees emphasised that even though they are aware of the poor state of the private schools' infrastructure and the low quality of teachers, to them what matters most is whether learning takes place and they judge this by the examination results. The following excerpt from an interview with a 40 year old male household head highlights this view:

... just last year (2007) a public DoA<sup>5</sup> School presented 30 candidates for the BECE, only five passed, while in Public DoD only two passed. But private DoS school topped all the basic schools in the community ... if we look at private DoS school you will realise that it is not up to the standard ... I mean looking at the school structure you will find that it is not a nice place to send your child but then learning takes place ... 'if I am learning under a tree with the sun shining directly on my head or even beaten by the rain and will benefit from good education, I will prefer that to learning in a storey building which has air conditioning in all the classrooms but will benefit nothing or very little ...

Several interviewees who had chosen private schooling noted that even though they had temporary wooden structures, what mattered most was that their children passed the Basic Education Certificate Examination (BECE). Interviewees indicated that a lack of discipline among pupils was responsible for the poor examination results in public schools, and blamed the teachers for failing to instil discipline in the children under their care. The following observation by a household head with children in both public and private school reflects this view:

During our time, public schools used to be good and they used to teach a lot ... but these days, the young teachers we have don't care. They treat children's behaviour at school with apathy and they think that 'the children will reap what they sew.' After all, at the end of the month, the teacher will still receive their salary. (A 52-year-old female household head)

As a result of this perceived situation, several household heads with children in both public and private schools indicated that they would have preferred a private school for all their children, but for its relatively high cost. Almost all household heads interviewed that had enrolled children in both school types indicated their willingness to move all their children from public to private education; but because they could not afford to pay the private school fees and other charges for all the children in the household, they had elected to enrol at least one child in private school with the intention of moving those in public school into private education if there was an improvement in their income.

Furthermore, interviewees noted that private school heads were committed to their work and showed an interest in the welfare of their pupils by visiting parents at home to share with them their children's progress at school. They also mentioned that when a child did not attend school on a particular day, the head teacher would go to the pupil's home to discover the

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<sup>5</sup> DoA, DoD and DoS are pseudonyms of different public schools.

reason and would often succeed in getting the child to return to school. The following comment from a 36-year-old household head with children in both public and private schools reflects this view:

A private man who has set up his school and is incurring expenses has an eye on the children ... If a child does not go to school for a day, the teacher visits their home to find out why they were not in school, and ensures that they report to school the next day. That is what I don't mind paying for my child to have a good education.

Private schools in the communities in the study showed great interest in their pupils' progress, based on the head teacher and household heads' interview. Sabates, et. al. (2010) found that in Bangladesh visit by teachers to homes was associated with lower levels of school dropout. Evidently, teacher visit to children's homes ensured LFPs reduced dropout rate and this was needed because the survival and sustainability of the school depends on attracting the children of more households to pay school fees and other costs. Thus, private schools in these rural communities may be considered to have created something of a niche by interacting with parents in a particular way – by taking an interest in the welfare of their children.

What was clear from household head interviewees was that several of the household heads that enrolled their children in only public schools would have preferred private schooling because of their perception of its quality. But there were some who still saw public schooling as the better alternative, citing prominent persons like teachers, lawyers and parliamentarians who had attended the public school in their community. For those that chose the combined option or private schooling only, they were apparently motivated by the fact that because they pay fees, school heads and their teachers know they have a responsibility to them and therefore deliver education to their children. In addition, household heads that choose the combined option and private school only emphasised the importance of teacher and pupil discipline, arguing that in private schools, monitor ring of the activities of teachers and pupils is key to their success in examinations. However, the underlying factor that was significant for all three categories of household head interviewees was examination results. As a result, this paper examines indicators of the quality of private schools in poor rural/deprived areas of Mfantseman with a focus on school inputs and examination/tests results.

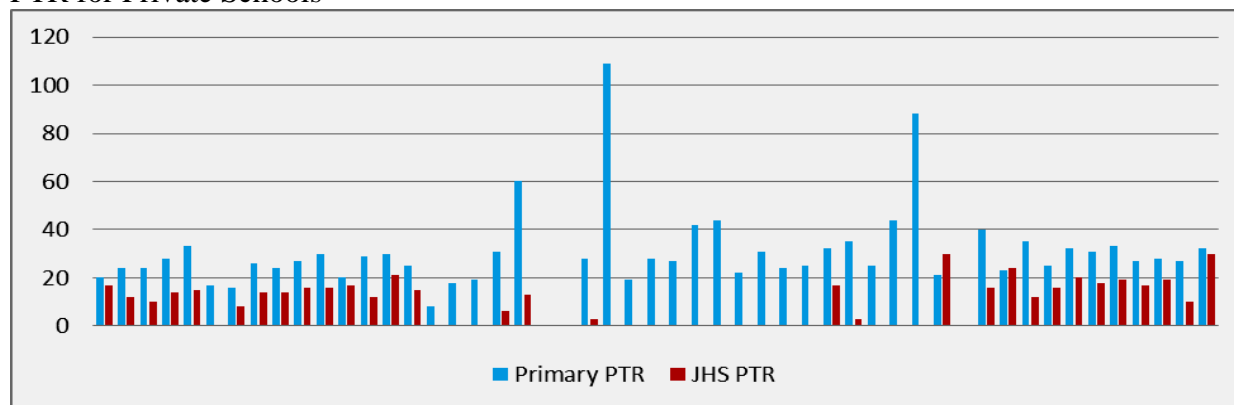
## **5.2 Comparing the School inputs of Public and Private Schools**

### **5.2.1 How do Inputs in Public and Private Deprived Schools Compare?**

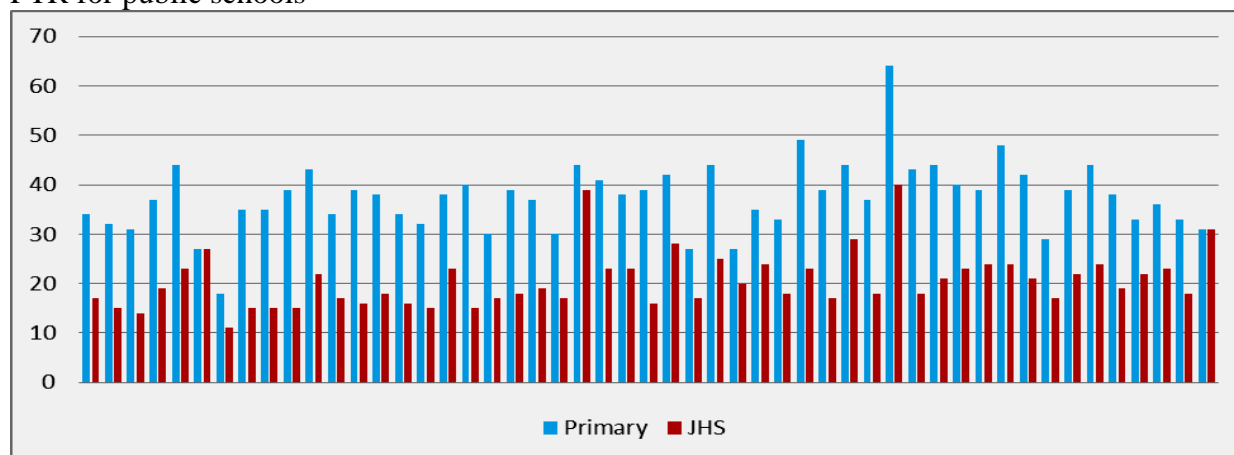
The number of pupils per teacher in a class is an important determinant of how much a child might benefit from teaching in school. Figure 1 shows that of the 53 educationally deprived districts in Ghana, 31 had pupil teacher ratios (PTR) beyond the norm set by the Ghana Education Service - 35 and 25 for primary and JHS respectively. PTRs in private schools were generally within the GES norm of a manageable class size, except in six of the districts where the PTRs for private primary schools were far beyond the norm –ranging between 44 and 108 pupils per class. This has implications for the provision of quality education in such districts.

**Figure 1: Pupil-teacher Ratio of Public and Private Schools in Deprived Districts, 2009.**

PTR for Private Schools



PTR for public schools

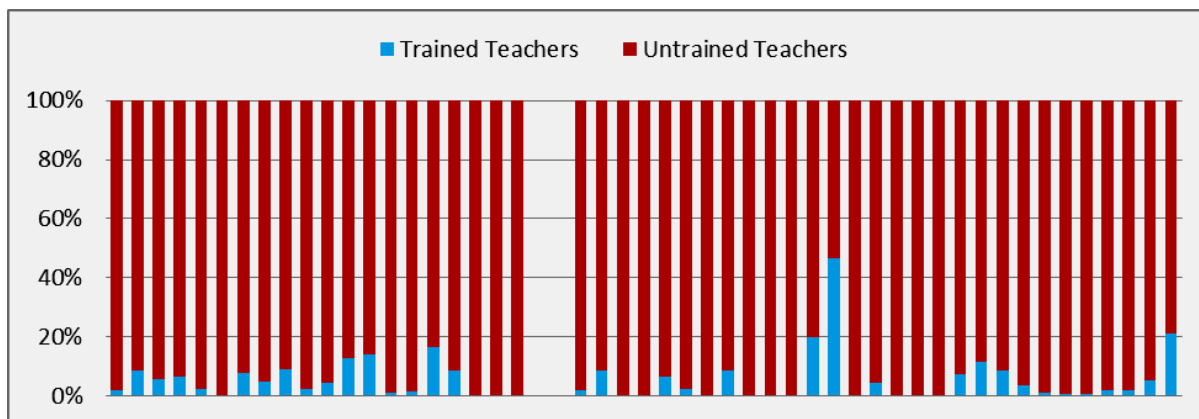


Source: MOESS (EMIS data), 2009

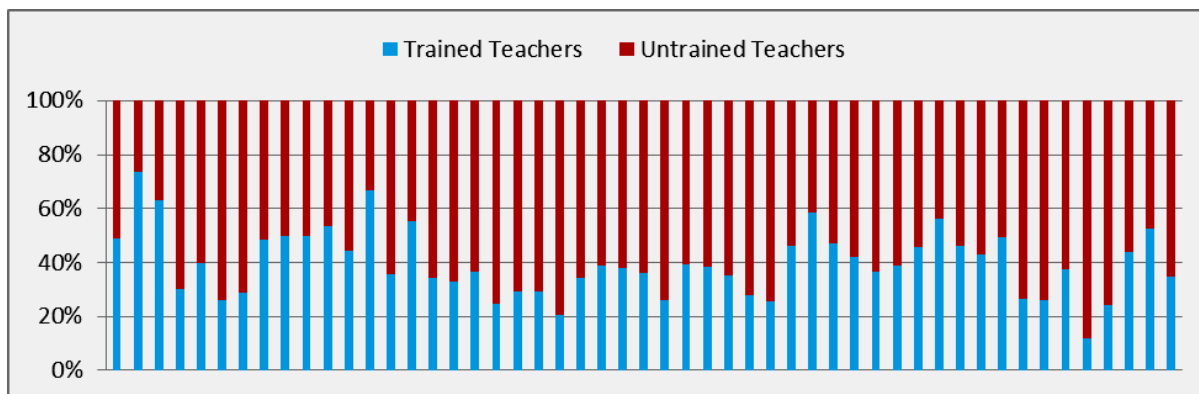
Another important indicator of the quality of education is the extent to which the teacher is professionally trained to do the job. Using the EMIS data on teachers in public and private schools in deprived districts in 2009, the quality of teachers are compared below. Figure 2 shows the proportions of trained and untrained teachers in educationally deprived districts. Almost half of the teachers in public schools in educationally deprived districts were trained. However, of the 49 districts that had private schools, 18 had no trained teachers – only one district had 44% of its teachers trained, 2 districts had 20% trained and the remaining districts had less than 20% trained teachers. Thus, even though public schools in the district had just 50% trained teachers, in private schools, less than 10% of teachers were trained.

**Figure 2: Proportion of Trained/Untrained Teachers in Deprived Districts, 2009 – Private**

Private school teachers



Public school teachers



The EMIS coverage does not include unregistered private schools, however, it is not likely that, for example, unregistered low fee private schools would have trained teachers because of the relatively low salary they offer compared to the public sector. Low fee registered private schools have mainly untrained teachers, and unregistered low fee private schools probably do too.

In short, the analyses of inputs to public and private schools in the deprived districts clearly show that schooling inputs are generally inadequate in the various schools types. A significant proportion of teachers in public school (about 50%) are not trained. The picture of the quality of teachers in private is worse - as less than 10% of the teachers were trained. The PTR in some districts at the primary level was far beyond the stipulated enrolment norm of 35 pupils per teacher in primary in both public and private schools. Given that a significant proportion of teachers are untrained and coupled with high pupil teacher ratios, the quality of education in these districted might be considered to be in jeopardy. Nonetheless, there is in the interview findings of this study and in some of the literature a general perception that private schools do better in examinations than their public schools counterparts. For example, studies conducted in poor peri-urban area of Ga District of Ghana concluded that the private schools were doing better than public schools, in terms of examination results (Tooley and

Dixon, 2007a). The next section examines the evidence for superior BECE examination results in private compared to public schools in educationally deprived districts of Ghana.

### **5.3 Analysis of BECE Results of Basic Schools in Educationally Deprived Districts**

This section analyses the BECE examination results of public and private schools in educationally deprived districts of Ghana from 2005–2008. It begins with a descriptive analysis, comparing the means and standard deviations of aggregate examination scores, and compares English language and mathematics scores for the years under consideration in public and private schools in order to determine which school type as a whole is doing better in examinations. Bar graphs showing the 10th and 80th percentiles of results are used to deepen understanding of the differences in performance. Finally, two sample t-tests are conducted to determine whether statistically significant differences exist in the performance of public and private basic schools in the educationally deprived districts.

#### **5.3.1 Comparing the Mean, Mode and Percentile Scores of BECE Results, 2005-2008**

In order to provide insights into the performance of public and private schools in the deprived districts, the mean aggregate score and the mean and modal grade for English language and mathematics for the various school types were estimated. Table 1 shows the mean results of schools in deprived districts. The mean aggregate results for the various school types between 2005 and 2008 show that private schools achieved much better results than public schools. Since the cut off point for qualification into post basic education in Ghana until the year 2010 was aggregate 30 – this suggests that pupils from public basic schools on average failed to meet the requirements to transit to post basic education. Children from private schools stood a better chance of accessing post basic education than those from public schools<sup>6</sup>.

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<sup>6</sup> If it is assumed that pupils scoring aggregate 30 or less have passed their English language, mathematics and general science subjects with at least Grade 6.



**Table 1: Mean and Modal Scores in BECE Exams in Educationally Deprived Schools.**

<b>Mean aggregate of BECE results of schools in deprived schools, 2005-2008</b>						
	Public			Private		
Year	N	Mean	Sd	N	Mean	Sd
2005	23,310	30.88	8.96	7,910	27.96	9.53
2006	51,748	31.55	9.30	10,653	25.57	10.30
2007*	10,512	31.54	9.09	2,984	26.84	10.00
2008	52,988	32.15	8.77	12,544	25.96	9.91
<b>Mean grade in English Language in deprived schools, 2005-2008</b>						
Year	N	Mean	Sd	N	Mean	Sd
2005	23,034	5.60	1.59	7,820	5.00	1.58
2006	50,987	5.97	1.62	10,457	4.81	1.68
2007*	10,397	5.78	1.60	2,930	4.77	1.58
2008	52,579	6.02	1.59	12,419	4.83	1.73
<b>Mean grade in Mathematics in deprived schools, 2005-2008</b>						
Year	N	Mean	Sd	N	Mean	Sd
2005	23,036	5.48	1.67	7,816	5.12	1.77
2006	50,830	5.48	1.82	10,438	4.58	1.81
2007	10,386	5.59	1.79	2,928	5.02	1.92
2008	52,571	5.59	1.67	12,421	4.86	1.84
<b>Modal grade in BECE English Language of deprived schools , 2005-2008</b>						
Year	Public School		Private School		English Language	
2005	5		5		5	
2006	6		5		5	
2007	5		5		5	
2008	5		5		5	
<b>Modal grade in BECE Mathematics of deprived schools , 2005-2008</b>						
2005	5		5		5	
2006	5		5		5	
2007	5		5		5	
2008	5		5		5	

2007\*= Many schools have their results cancelled because of examination malpractices.

Source: Author's calculation from WAEC BECE results, 2010

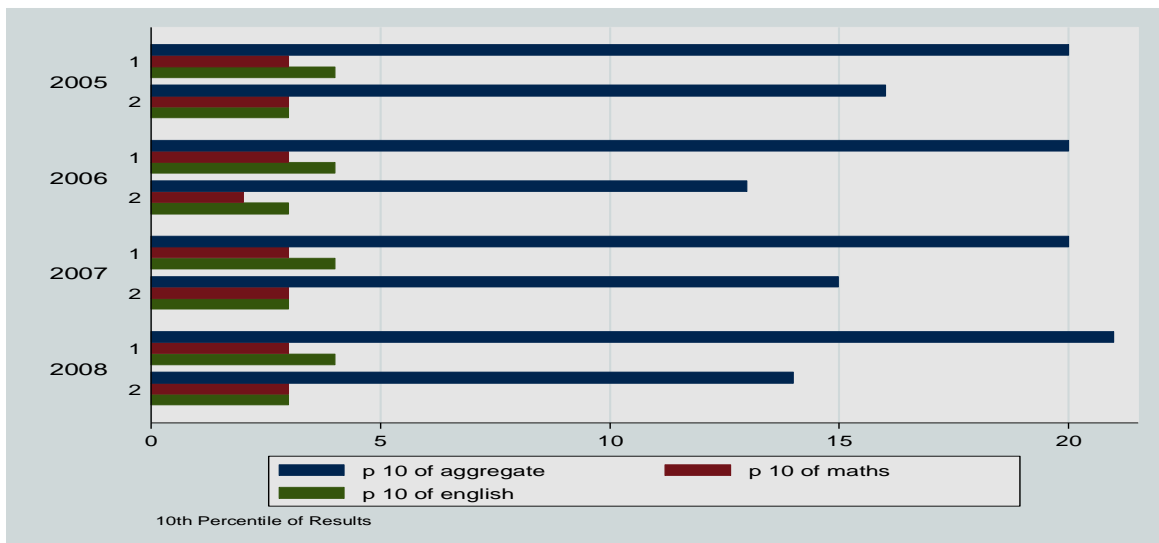
Since literacy and numeracy are the key goals of the basic education policy, the mean grade scores in English language and mathematics are also compared in the table. On the whole, the mean grade in English in public schools was 6 compared to 5 in private schools. Even though the mean grade in English language in private schools is the same as their modal score (5), public schools also had modal score in English language being 5 throughout the period under consideration, except in 2006 where it rose to 6 as indicated in Table 1. This suggests that in terms of performance in English language, most pupils in both public and private schools had the same modal grade score of 5 and therefore had equal chances of meeting the English language requirement to senior high school.

With regards to mathematics performance, the mean grade score in public schools in 2005 and 2006 was 5, while in 2007 and 2008 the mean grade was 6, compared to the private schools which achieved a grade of 5 throughout 2005 to 2008. The modal score in mathematics for the two school types indicates that, from 2005-2008 most pupils scored 5 in mathematics in both public and private schools (see table 1). Considering that the sample districts are peri-urban with relatively high cost private schools compared to those in rural areas, makes this result surprising.

Comparative analysis of public and private schools' BECE results using percentiles provides more insight into the examination performance of the two school types. Figure 3 shows that the top 10% of public school candidates scored an average aggregate of 20 in 2005, 2006 and 2007. However, in 2008 the aggregate rose to 23. Compared to public schools, the top 10% of candidates in private school scored an aggregate score of 16 2005, 13 in 2006, 15 in 2007 and 14 in 2008. Therefore, in terms of overall performance of the 10th percentile of the candidates, private schools performed better than public schools. This is really not surprising given that these private schools are high cost and selective.

Mathematics results indicate that 10% of candidates in both public and private school scored 3 throughout the years, except in 2006 when private schools improved to a score of 2. However, private schools did better in English language than public schools – the top 10% of private school candidates scored 3 in English compared to 4 by public schools throughout the period.

**Figure 3: Tenth Percentile of BECE Results, 2005-2008**



NB: 1=Public, 2=Private

Generally, the descriptive analyses have shown that private schools are doing better than public schools, but what is not clear is whether the differences in performance in BECE by private and public schools in these deprived districts are statistically significant. As a result, a t-test is conducted to determine whether there is difference in the performance between public and private is significant. Table 2 shows the results.

**Table 2: Two Sample T-tests comparing Aggregate BECE Results of Public and Private Schools in Educationally Deprived Districts, 2005-2008**

School type	N	Mean	Std. Err.	Std. Dev.	[95% Conf. Interval]	
Public	138558	31.66	0.02	9.04	31.62202	31.71725
Private	34091	26.38	0.05	10.00	26.27779	26.49021
combined	172649	30.62	0.02	9.47	30.58124	30.67065
diff		5.28	0.05		5.176132	5.39513
diff = mean(1) - mean(2)			t = 94.6103			
Ho: diff = 0			df= 172647			
Ha: diff < 0			Ha: diff != 0		Ha: diff > 0	
Pr(T < t) = 1.0000			Pr( T  >  t ) = 0.0000		Pr(T > t) = 0.0000	

The result rejects the hypothesis of no difference in examination performance indicating that nationally private schools in educationally deprived districts perform better than their public school counterparts in the BECE. The mean aggregate score in BECE is not the same across public and private schools and the mean difference of 5.28 between public and private is statistically significant. What might account for these results could be selectivity in student admission and also in-school support strategies such as the provision of extra teaching or tuition by private schools. Better performance by private schools could be due to the practice of excluding poor performing students from sitting for the final exams. Also of course, the relatively affluent and more educated households which can afford the cost of private schooling may have better appreciation of the value of education and therefore are more willing as well as more able to support their children's education (Härmä, 2008; Glewwe and Patrinos, 1999). The evidence from the educationally deprived districts confirms that private schools perform better than public schools.

One major criticism of this national data on BECE results from educationally deprived district is that it does not present the typical examination results of schools in rural areas. This is because the data includes high cost peri-urban private schools and rural schools together. Therefore, the data does not present the true picture of a typical poor rural environment. The evidence from this analysis is, however, consistent with Tooley and Dixon's (2007) findings in peri-urban Ga Wes district of Ghana. However, what is not known is how examination performance compares in a typical rural setting. The rest of this paper examines the evidence of school quality focusing on two study rural educational circuits in the Mfantseman district.

#### **5.4 Do Inputs of Study LFPSs and Public Rural Schools Compare?**

As indicated earlier in this paper, household heads involved in school choice cited the better quality of LFP schools as the principal motivation for enrolling their children in private schools. This section examines the evidence for whether low fee private schools provide better quality than public schools. First, the inputs of the study of public and low-fee private schools are examined. These inputs are the number of teachers and their quality of training, pupil-teacher ratios, the type of school building and number of classrooms per school by school type. Table 3 shows the inputs of the three public schools in the study and the three low-fee private schools selected in poor rural communities in the Mfantseman district.

Generally, public schools have more and better trained teachers. In Medico Public School<sup>7</sup>, 8 of its 9 teachers were professionally trained, while Domino had 11 of its 15 teachers trained. Compared to public schools, only 1 teacher in the low fee private schools was trained with the other teachers being either senior high school (SHS) leavers or graduates from the technical schools.

**Table 3: Inputs of Public and LFPSs in Mfantseman, 2010**

Inputs	Public School			Low-cost Private School		
	Medico	Domino	Kyoto	Holomo	Shamo	Fremo
Teacher Qualification	8 trained and 1 untrained teachers	11 trained teachers and 4 untrained	3 trained and 12 untrained teachers	12 untrained teachers – all SSS graduates	11 untrained teachers – 10 SSS graduate and 1 Technical School graduate	9 untrained teachers – SSS graduates, 1 trained and two others still under training.
Pupil – Teacher ratio Primary	93:1	20:1	26:1	37:1	31:1	25:1
Pupil-Teacher Ratio JHS	46:1	10:1	17:	13:1	20:1	10:1
Type of Building	Cement/ concrete block	Cement /concrete classroom block and a pavilion	Cement/ concrete block	Mud and thatch building with un-tarred floor	Pavillion with earth floor (not tard)	Bamboo and Palm branches
Number of class rooms	9 classroom block	6 classroom block	9 classroom block	3 rooms – cement block and 4 rooms build with mud and thatch	1 room – cement block, pavilion cover with bamboo. Some classes held under trees	2 rooms made - cement block

Source: Field Data, 2010

Pupil-teacher ratios (PTR) were higher at the primary level in both public and low-fee private schools than at the junior high school (JHS) level. However, in one public school (Medico School), the PTR was higher than the laid down norm by the Ghana Education Service – which requires the number of pupils in class at the primary and JHS levels to be 35 and 25 respectively (MOESS, 2008). The reason for the large pupil-teacher ratio in Medico School is due to the fact that it is the only public school in the community. Consequently, the overcrowded classrooms could have a significant impact on the quality of education in Medico. Almost all the public schools had cement block buildings and writing desks. Even

<sup>7</sup> Medico public school is a pseudonym

though Medico public school was overcrowded, pupils had furniture to sit and write on. In contrast, all the low-fee private schools were either build from mud and thatch or bamboo/wood roofed with palm branches. In some of the LFP schools visited, classes were held under trees because the schools do not have sufficient classrooms or sheltered places for classes.

**Table 4: Inputs of Schools in the Mfantseman District, 2008**

Inputs	Public School	Private School
Primary School Teachers		
<i>Trained</i>	422	30
<i>Untrained</i>	232	210
<i>Untrained as % total</i>	35.47	87.5
Junior High School Teachers		
<i>Trained</i>	456	35
<i>Untrained</i>	128	122
<i>Untrained as % total</i>	21.92	77.71
Pupil-Teacher Ratio		
<i>Primary</i>	42:1	24:1
<i>JHS</i>	19:1	14:1
Schools and Classrooms		
<i>No. of Primary schools</i>	107	42
<i>No. of classrooms</i>	628	224
<i>% of Classrooms NMR</i>	15	1
<i>No. of JHS</i>	94	31
<i>No. of Classrooms</i>	304	97
<i>% of Classrooms NMR</i>	23	5

Note: NMR refers to classrooms needing major repairs.

Source: Ghana EMIS, 2009

Juxtaposing the input indicators of the study rural schools (see Table 3) to the overall school inputs in the Mfantseman district (Table 4) is useful in explaining the quality of inputs of public and private school as a whole in the district. Table 4 compares schooling inputs of public and private schools in the Mfantseman district in 2008. A greater proportion of teachers in the public schools compared to private schools in the district were trained. Public schools had only about a third (35.47%) of the teachers untrained compared to the private schools that had 87.5% of its teachers untrained. As expected, the pupil teacher ratios were higher for both levels of schooling in public than in private schools. There were about 3 times as many public schools as private schools.

The number of classrooms that required major repairs in the public schools was proportionately greater than in the private schools. This, however, does not mean that low-fee private schools in Mfantseman have better school infrastructure than public schools. This is because apart from the fact that low-fee private schools operate in temporary structures, the EMIS data covers only schools that are recognised by the Ghana Education Service (GES). As a result, unregistered private schools, particularly the low-free private schools in the rural areas which are run in temporary shelters are not covered. Therefore, the private schools needing major repairs can only be those in the urban area. It can therefore be concluded that, among the school types in the Mfantseman District, public schools have better quality inputs than private schools. This pattern is not only consistent with rural and urban schools in the district, but also urban schools in other districts in the country (MOESS, 2008). Clearly, if public schools have more and better quality inputs, then it would be expected that they would translate this into better outcomes than the LFPSs.

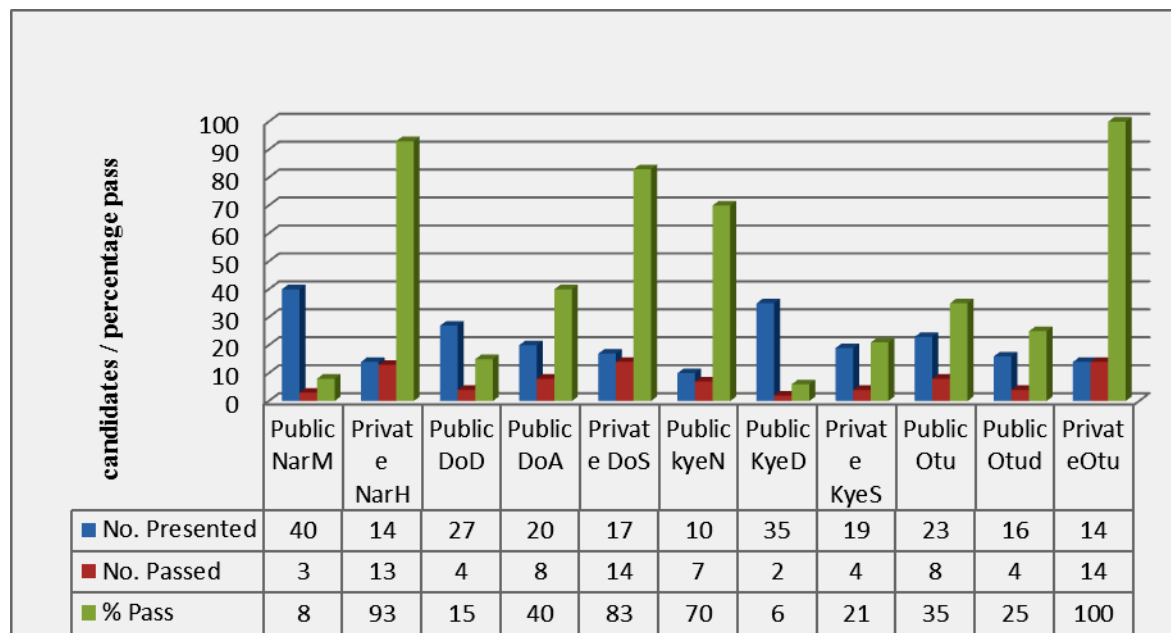
### 5.5 How do Examination Outcomes for Public and LFPSs Compare?

It is important to note that since unrecognised LFPSs were not registered with the GES, they were unable to establish their own examination centres; candidates from these schools normally entered for the BECE at nearby recognised LFPSs. In order to gain a deeper insight into the respective performances of public and private schools in the same neighbourhood, analysis of BECE results from 2007, 2008 and 2009 focused on rural communities in which both public schools and LFPSs were located.

Figure 4 shows the 2007 BECE results. In Eku community, the public school (Public NarM) entered 40 candidates but only 3 (8%) passed<sup>8</sup>; while the LFPS (Private NarH) entered 14 candidates and succeeded in 13 (93%) passes. In Domaa community, two public schools (Public DoD and Public DoA) entered 27 and 20 candidates respectively, but managed only 4 (15%) and 8 (40%) passes; compared to their private school counterpart, which entered 17 candidates and succeeded in 14 (83%) passes. In Kokodo community, two public schools (KyeN and KyeD) entered 10 and 35 candidates respectively, enjoying somewhat different success rates with 7 (70%) and 2 (6%) passes; while their private school counterpart entered 19 but managed only 4 (21%) passes. Finally, two public schools in Otu community entered 23 and 16 candidates respectively, managing 8 (35%) and 4 (25%) passes; while the local private school succeeded in a 100% pass rate in respect of its 16 candidates.

Clearly in 2007, the general performance of LFPSs in rural Mfantseman was better than that of their public school counterparts. However, such LFPS superiority notwithstanding, the analysis shows that in one community, an LFPS performed comparatively poorly, achieving a pass rate of only 21% compared to the public school pass rate of 70%.

**Figure 4: BECE Results for Rural Communities in Mfantseman hosting both Public and Private Schools (2007)**



<sup>8</sup> A pass at BECE level is the sum of the candidate's best grades in six subjects between aggregate 6 and 30.

Figure 5 shows the BECE results for 2008. In Domaa, public school BECE results were generally poor compared to their LFPS counterparts: Public DoA entered 22 candidates but only 6 (about 27%) passed, while Public DoA, which entered 33 candidates, managed only 6 (18%) passes; compared to the only registered LFPS, DoS, which entered 17 candidates and succeeded in 14 (83%) passes. A similar pattern emerged in Eku Takyiman, where the LFPS (Private Eku) succeeded in a 100% pass rate compared to that of about 30% achieved by the public school. Generally, the results show that LFPSs performed much better than public schools in Domaa and Eku.

However, such a pattern was not uniform across all rural communities. This was because in some localities, there was not much difference in terms of BECE results between the different types of school. In Eku, for example, the LFPS (Private NarH) entered 13 candidates and 6 (46%) passed, compared to the public school's (PublicM) 30% pass rate. In Kokodo, the private school (Private KyeS) entered 11 candidates but only 1 (9%) passed; while the public school (Public KyeD) entered 19 candidates but only 3 (16%) passed. Similarly, the other public school (Public KyeN) also entered 16 candidates but did not succeed in any passes. In contrast, in Otu, both Public Otu and Private Otu succeeded in 100% pass rates.

Therefore, the 2008 BECE results show that even though in some rural communities LFPSs performed no better than public schools, elsewhere a number of public schools performed just as well as their LFPS counterparts. What is clear from the analysis is that even though some LFPSs were low performing, most performed better than their public school counterparts. This supports the perception of their quality in terms of examination results, which apparently fuels household interest in them.

In 2009, the BECE results showed different pattern of performances on the part of the various school types, as indicated in Figure 6. On the whole, LFPSs performed much better, their pass rates ranging from 64% to 100%. In Domaa, while the LFPS (Private DoS) enjoyed a 96% pass rate amongst its 14 candidates, the two public schools (Public DoD and Public DoA) entered 19 and 46 candidates respectively, but managed pass rates of just 37% and 24%. In Eku, the LFPS (Private NarH) entered 18 candidates and achieved a 94% pass rate, while the public school (Public NarD) entered 65 candidates but only achieved a 23% pass rate. Therefore, in Domaa and Eku communities, households may to some extent be considered justified in claiming that LFPSs performed better than the public schools in these localities.

In Kokodo, the two public schools (Kye D and Kye N) entered 45 and 30 candidates respectively, achieving pass rates of just 2.2% and 27%; however, the LFPS (Kye S) hardly did much better, with only 4 (19%) of its 21 candidates passing. This is a clear indication that not all LFPSs were more accomplished than public schools in the same communities; indeed, in some rural communities public schools performed just as well in the BECE as their LFPS counterparts. Yet, given that private school pupils were selected in part by the willingness of their parents to pay – unlike the case with the public schools, for which there was at least in theory a policy of universal admission and a chance to progress – it can be argued that the LFPS attracted an elite group of children who were already blessed with the necessary advantages to enable them to perform well.

Figure 5: BECE Results for Rural Communities in Mfantseman hosting both Public and Private Schools (2008)

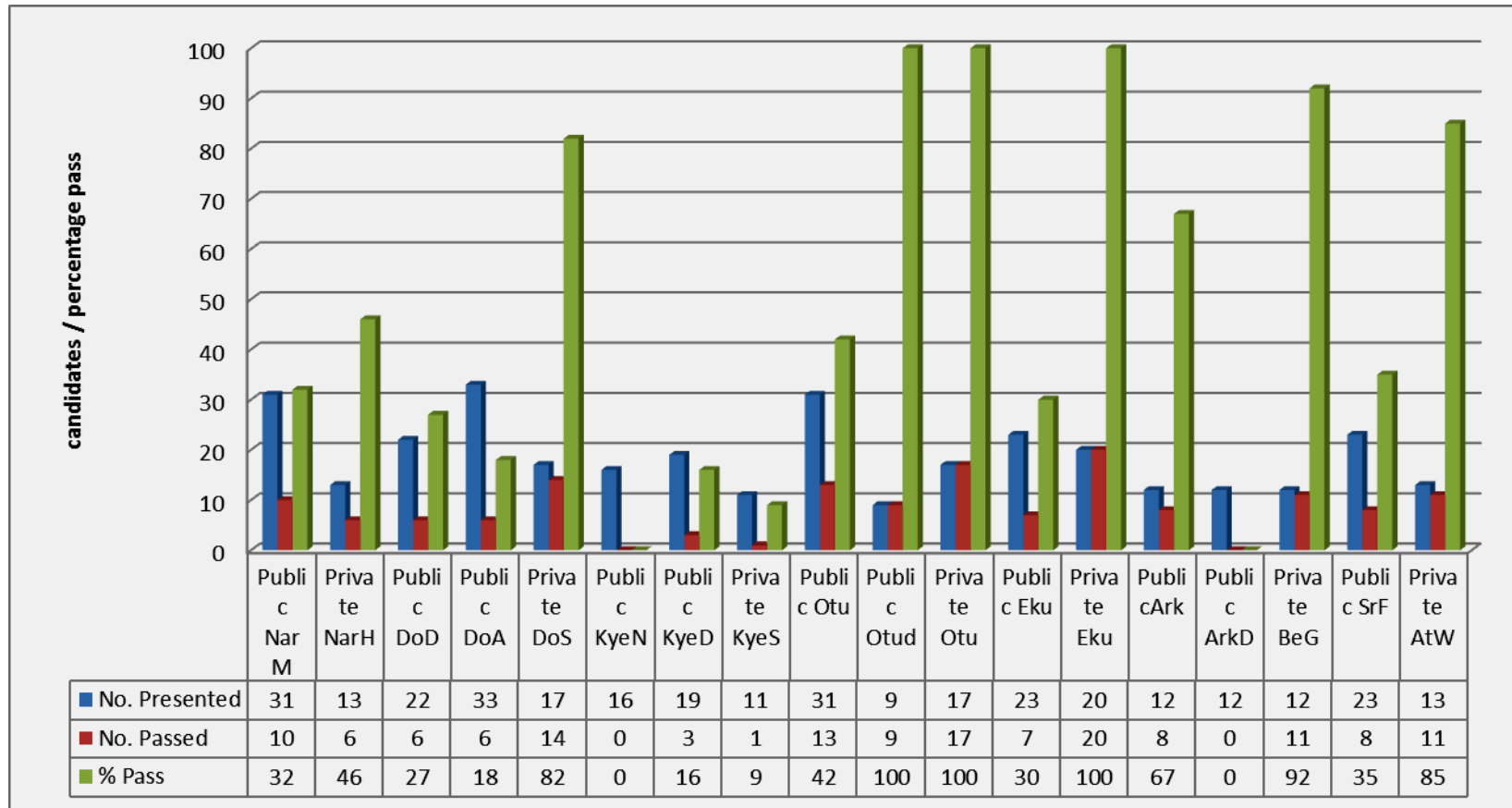
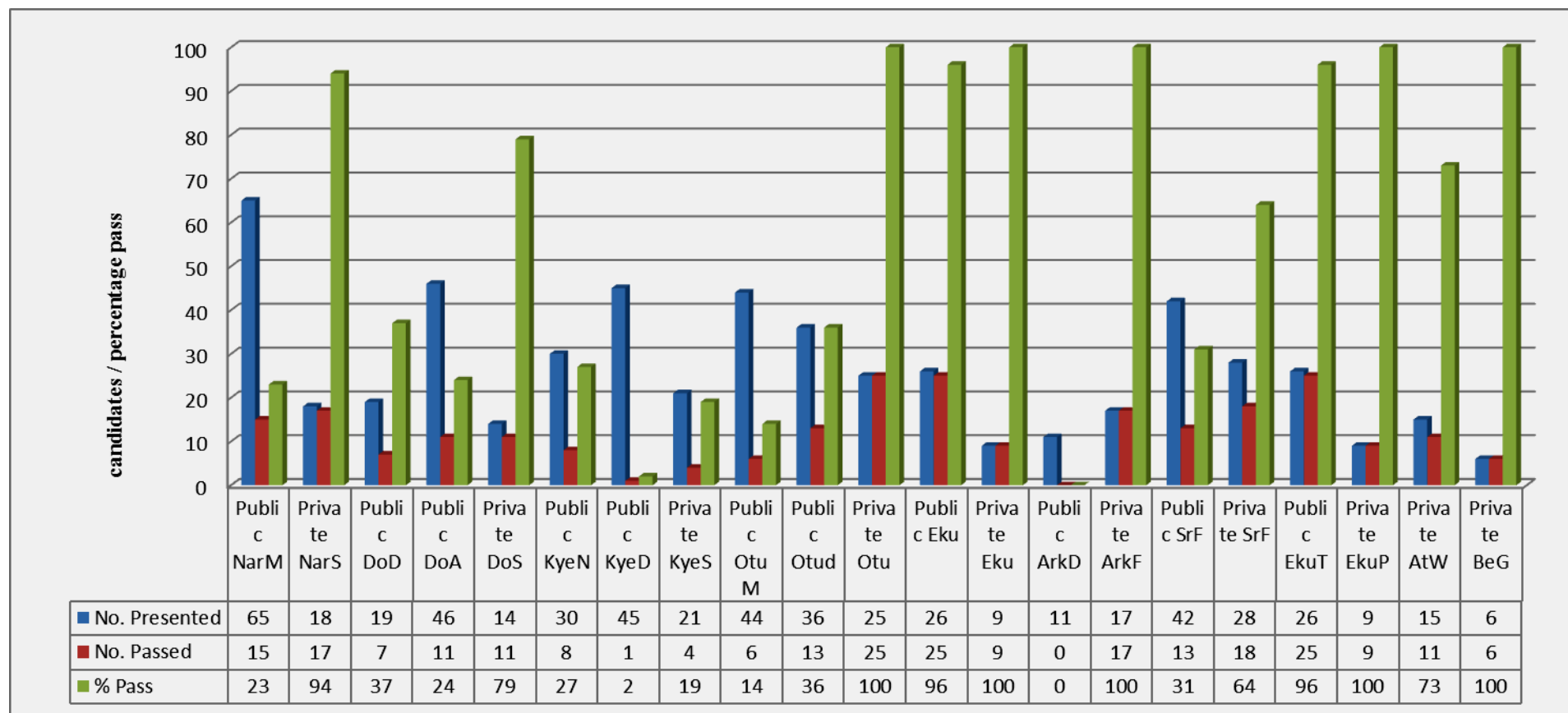




Figure 6: BECE Results for Rural Communities in Mfantseman hosting both Public and Private Schools (2009)



### **5.5.1 Evidence from Interview Data**

Interviews with the head teachers of three of the four LFPSs indicated that several strategies were employed to help better their performance in the BECE. For example, they revealed that teachers spent additional time coaching pupils at school, using supplementary materials in addition to the government-approved textbooks. They also indicated that pupils who failed progress examinations were made to repeat the grade, while those who had proceeded to the next grade but failed to sustain a high level of performance in the first term examination in the final year of the basic education cycle were also encouraged to repeat the grade.

If parents were reluctant to have their children repeat a grade, they were given the option of withdrawing them from the school. For example, the head teacher of Shamo LFPS explained that 3 of the 19 final year pupils had repeated the grade in 2008, while one child had left school due their parents' unwillingness for them to be subjected to this policy. Clearly, LFPSs only selected their most promising pupils to enter for the BECE, a practice that would not have been tolerated in public school.

It can be concluded from the analysis of the BECE results that in two of the study communities – Domaa and Eku – LFPSs performed better than public schools; while, in Kokodo, LFPS examination performance was no better than that of public schools. It was also found that in some other rural communities of the district, several public schools performed just as well as LFPSs. Given that LFPSs tended to prevent pupils who performed poorly from entering for the examination, and the fact that some LFPSs performed as well or as poorly as public schools, it may be inferred that LFPSs were no better than public schools in rural Mfantseman.

The foregoing analysis has dwelt mainly on descriptive statistics, and has thus not controlled for the background characteristics of pupils that might affect test performance. For example, households with a better socio-economic background were more likely to enrol their children in LFPS, since, due to their economic and social capital; they were more readily able to support their children's education. Therefore, in order to control for these factors, a regression analysis was conducted to explain differences in performance. However, it is important to note that the regression analysis was based on the assumption that children were randomly enrolled in the various schools of a given locality, even though some households may in reality have deliberately chosen a specific school for their children. The next section presents the regression results.

### **5.6 Explaining Test Performance and Progress in English and Mathematics**

Table 5 reports the results of estimation of the effects of schools on the performance and progress made by pupils in English and mathematic tests, controlling for the background characteristics of pupils using regression analysis. Dummy variables are used for each school to capture the effects on performance common to all children at the school, which may be considered to capture the effect of the school itself. Without controls for child background characteristics, these dummy variables would also capture the effect of common pupil characteristics. Background controls are included however, while it should be remembered that the dummies will continue to capture the effect of unobserved common characteristics. Nonetheless, the approach provides an illustration of the differences in performance at school level, controlling for important pupil characteristics. The results are not interpreted necessarily as causal effects of schools. The results show that school dummy variables are

statistically significant in explaining pupil performance in English and mathematics in the cases of many of the schools under study. The reference category is the lowest performing school, so that the significant effects indicate a significant difference between an individual school and the school with the lowest performance in the category concerned.

The reference category (lowest performing school) for the modelling of results in English and maths is a rural public school. In the case of progress scores, which measure the difference between pupils' score in 2007 and 2008 on the same test, however, the reference category is a rural private school.

In English, private schools scored higher than the reference public school for the most part when controlling for children's age and sex and for the household caregiver's literacy level. However there were two public schools which also scored highly when compared to the reference school. In mathematics, the pattern was somewhat similar with typically higher scores for the private schools plus the two best performing public schools.

When progress in both English and mathematics is examined, however, a somewhat different pattern emerges. While the models for English and maths results control for background characteristics, they do not control for children's prior ability. And it is not unreasonable to expect that households might enrol more able pupils in private school, or that those with better socio-economic circumstances may have more able children, including because they may have received better education earlier on in their lives. So the progress measures may be considered a better measure of school effects, by controlling for a range of unobserved factors which served to determine the original test score. While advantage in terms of home background will also affect progress, it may be expected to have a much smaller effect than on the first score. In terms of progress in English, there was not a strong pattern of greater progress being made in private schools. Indeed the lowest progress was made in a private school, but otherwise there is no clear distinction in terms of the progress made between the school types. In mathematics, only one school was associated with progress which was higher than in the reference (private) school in statistically significant terms. Interestingly, this was a rural public school.

When comparing within the same community, in Dominase circuit there appeared to be no private school advantage in English or in mathematics scores. Nor was there a clear advantage in relation to progress in mathematics or English. In Narkwa, although the highest scoring school in English and mathematics, when controlling for pupil backgrounds, was a private school, there was no large difference among the schools and the lowest scoring school was also private. Again, in relation to progress, notable differences between public and private schools are not found. In effect, what is found to be generally true of urban and peri-urban private schools— as indicated by the GSS (2005) and Tooley and Dixon (2007) — does not hold in rural Mfantseman District when comparing across and within two education circuits. Apparently, as far as the poor are concerned, the indices of quality are not based on school-level differences in scores which account for pupil backgrounds, but then those are of course difficult to discern.

**Table 5: Determinants of Performance and Progress in Test Scores at the Basic School Level**

VARIABLES	Performance 2007/08		Progress 2007/8-2008/9	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
	English 07–08	Mathematics 07–08	English 07–09	Mathematics 07–09
Sex	0.748 (0.35)	5.180 (2.75)***	1.434 (0.53)	5.339 (2.37)**
Age	11.399 (7.32)***	8.027 (6.01)***	5.043 (2.39)**	0.352 (0.21)
Household literacy (Test Sum)	0.064 (0.87)	0.083 (1.32)	0.043 (0.48)	-0.001 (-0.01)
<i>Dominase circuit schools</i>				
Public rural primary (Kokodo)	17.678 (2.10)**	14.611 (2.03)**	26.990 (2.11)**	-2.957 (-0.29)
Public rural JHS (Kokodo)	Ref	Ref	39.650 (2.84)***	18.995 (1.70)*
Public rural primary (Akoma)	6.949 (0.79)	9.883 (1.31)	26.608 (2.11)**	-5.110 (-0.51)
Public rural JHS (Akoma)	3.199 (0.37)	12.791 (1.72)*	24.900 (1.93)*	0.127 (0.01)
Private rural primary (Kokodo)	5.903 (0.69)	9.625 (1.30)	37.328 (3.06)***	2.583 (0.26)
<i>Narkwa circuit schools</i>				
Public rural primary (Eku)	29.740 (3.52)***	30.093 (4.19)***	31.115 (2.51)**	11.024 (1.10)
Public rural JHS (Eku)	28.020 (3.37)***	30.404 (4.21)***	34.746 (2.75)***	15.406 (1.47)
Private rural primary (Eku)	43.534 (4.71)***	38.575 (4.91)***	37.530 (2.79)***	11.633 (1.04)
Private rural JHS (Eku)	26.771 (2.62)***	30.562 (3.47)***	44.197 (2.97)***	18.592 (1.53)
Private rural JHS (Kokodo)	21.324 (2.27)**	15.257 (1.90)*	Ref	Ref
Constant	-100.769 (-4.48)***	-65.127 (-3.37)***	-65.924 (-2.34)**	15.230 (0.68)
Observations	254	248	175	170
R-squared	0.66	0.57	0.45	0.42

Notes: \*\*\* = p<0.01; \*\* = p<0.05; \* = p<0.1; t-statistics in parentheses

## **6. Conclusion**

The analysis of the BECE results from the educationally deprived districts of Ghana has confirmed the often held view that private schools perform better in examinations and criterion referenced test scores than public schools. The t-test analysis rejects the hypothesis of no difference in performance between the two school types in the educationally deprived districts of Ghana. This result was derived from a population of schools that are not representative of a typical poor rural setting – these are mainly peri-urban, high cost and selective private schools. As a result, to determine whether the perception of better quality private school apply in poor rural setting, a sample of schools was drawn from poor rural Mfantseman for analysis.

The results from the analysis upheld the hypothesis of no large or consistently significant difference in the performance of low-fee private and public schools in rural Mfantseman. Descriptive analyses of BECE results of schools in rural Mfantseman revealed that, while in some communities low-fee private schools performed better than public schools, in other rural communities public and private schools performed equally well (or poorly). Furthermore, after controlling for the background characteristics of pupils, and especially for prior test scores, the regression analyses showed no palpable systematic differences in performance between public and private schools.

Clearly, the question of whether the quality of low-fee private schools in rural areas is a perception or reality cannot be answered in a way that suggests low-fee private schools perform consistently better than their public school counterparts. The evidence from the analyses presented here suggests that the BECE performance of low-fee private schools and public schools in rural Mfantseman are not significantly different. Even though in some communities the LFPS might have performed better, this pattern of performance is not consistent. Indeed, some low-fee private schools in rural Mfantseman are performing as poorly as the public schools, while some public schools are performing just as well as low fee private schools. In the light of the above evidence, it can be concluded that the better quality of LFPSs relative to public schools in rural Mfantseman is more a matter of perception than reality when the matter is examined taking fuller account of the backgrounds of children and the communities in which the schools are located. Interviews with household heads indicate that the perception of better quality LFPSs has persisted partly because of household heads' high aspirations for their children's education, related to the examination results of higher performing private schools, likely those in more advantaged urban locations. Household heads' perceptions of better quality private education together with their aspirations fuel interest in private education.

Improving the professional practice of public school teachers and encouraging schools to be more child-friendly and child-seeking would potentially help to redeem their image in the rural areas. This could be achieved if the Ghana Education Service (GES) worked closely with communities to make rural public schools more accountable through regular supervision and monitoring of teachers in order to improve school practices such as discipline and the more effective use of instructional time; all of which contributed to negative perceptions of public schooling.

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## Appendix 1: Description of Explanatory Variables for Test Performance and Progress

<i>Child characteristics</i>	
Sex	Indicator variable of student (reference category female)
Age	Age in years
Over age years	Years of being over age
Fostering	Indicator variable, fostered =1, other =0
Pre-school years	Years spent in pre-school
Age of entry	Age in years of entry into primary
Private tuition outside home	Indicator variable, private tuition=1, other
Household literacy test sum	Household head total score in literacy test
Household water distance	Distance in kilometres
<i>Household Occupation/ Livelihood</i>	<i>Household indicator variables</i>
Farming	Household in farming =1, other=0
Casual labour	Household in casual labour=1, other=0
Household wages/salaries in employment	Earn wages/salary = 1, other=0
Household wages/salaries in non-agric	Earn wages/salary in non-agric=1, other=1
Household runs petty trade	Runs petty trade =1, other =0
Household runs major trade	Runs major trade=1, other=0
Foraging	Foraging =1, other=0
Charity/alms	Charity/alms =1, other=0
Safety net	Safety net =1, other=0
Private transfer within	Private transfer within Ghana=1, other=1
<i>Schools</i>	
Public rural primary Kokodo	Public primary school
Public rural JHS Kokodo	Public JHS
Public rural primary Akoma	Public primary
Public rural JHS Akoma	Public JHS
Private rural primary Kokodo	Private primary
Public rural primary Eku	Public primary
Public rural JHS Eku	Public JHS
Private rural primary Eku	Private primary
Private rural JHS Eku	Private JHS
Private rural JHS kokodo	Private JHS



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### Report summary:

The main argument used in explaining the increasing popularity of private schooling in an era of fee-free public education in developing countries relates to the perception of better quality education in the private sector. In Ghana, however, to the extent that it exists, the evidence for better quality is derived mainly from schools located in urban or peri-urban settings. As a result, little is known about the relative quality of public and private schools in poor rural areas. Using primary data derived from questionnaires and interviews and secondary data on BECE (Basic Education Certificate Examination) results, this paper contributes to the school choice debate by examining the school inputs and outcomes (exam/test results) of public and low-fee private schools in poor rural areas of Mfantseman district in southern Ghana. The paper argues that while the quality of private schools in urban settings may often be better than public schools in similar environments, at least in terms of measured outcomes, the same is not the case for the sampled schools in poor rural Mfantseman. It further contends that the simple perceptions of higher quality of low-fee private compared to public schools in rural settings are based on beliefs rather than realities. These perceptions, in addition to poor household heads' high aspirations for their children, fuel interest in private education. The paper suggests that for public schools to redeem their image the GES (Ghana Education Service) should consider working to make rural public schools more responsive and accountable to the communities they serve.

### Author notes:

Luke Akaguri studied at the Centre for International Education (CIE), University of Sussex. His DPhil thesis was on private education for the poor focusing mainly on analyzing household choice of schools and the impact of educational costs and finance on access to basic education for the poor in rural areas of Ghana. His research interest is in the area of educational cost and financing, education, poverty and development and educational management and planning.

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