



Consortium for Research on
Educational Access,
Transitions and Equity

**Access to Primary Education in Kenya:
A case study of the impact of the 2003 FPE initiative
at nine schools in Nairobi City and Nyeri District**

Anthony Somerset

July 2008

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Chapter 1

1.1 Free Primary Education in Kenya: A brief historical perspective

Aspirations for universal access to primary education have deep roots in Kenya. Well before the Emergency of the 1950s, nationalist leaders were pressing the colonial administration to make primary education compulsory for African children – as it already was for children of European and Asian origin. The response they received was unequivocal:

Government wishes to state that it is well aware of the demands for the introduction of compulsory education for Africans up to primary standard... But the capital commitment alone rules out the possibility of these demands being acceded to immediately...

Development Programme, 1954 - 1957

At Independence in 1963 the new Government led by President Kenyatta affirmed its commitment to free, universal primary education in several policy documents¹, but did not set a timetable for achieving it. Critical shortages of the secondary school and university graduates needed to take over middle-level and high-level positions from departing expatriates, and to provide a springboard for economic development, dictated that post-primary expansion should take priority.

The first Free Primary Education (FPE) initiative came after a decade of Independence, when, in 1974, formal school fees for the first four standards were abolished². The response was immediate and dramatic: in a single year, from 1973 to 1974, the Standard 1 intake shot up by more than 150%. Clearly the school fee, though it amounted to only Ksh 60 (about \$US 8) per annum and had been frozen at this level since 1964, had been a major barrier to access for many children from low-income families.

However the early gains were only partially sustained. Standard 1 intakes and total enrolments were permanently raised, but dropout levels rose sharply, so that from 1974 onwards well under half the pupils entering Standard 1 completed the primary course seven years later. Increased enrolments placed enormous strains on school resources: trained teachers, classrooms, textbooks and other learning materials were all in short supply, so quality suffered. In response the schools began imposing levies, to cover in particular the heavy costs of constructing new classrooms.

In 1979, shortly after Daniel arap Moi assumed the Presidency following the death of Jomo Kenyatta, a second Free Primary Education initiative was launched. The imposition of building levies and other non-fee charges on parents was prohibited; instead, schools were to raise the necessary funds through Harambee (self-help) activities involving the community as a whole. At the same time, a free school milk programme was introduced.

Again, this second FPE initiative elicited a substantial response – albeit less dramatic than the response which had followed the first initiative in 1974. Standard 1 intakes increased by about 60%, but subsequently the already-high dropout rate rose still further, so that as the

¹ Including Government of Kenya (1965) African Socialism and its Application to Planning in Kenya. Sessional Paper No 10. Nairobi: Government Printer.

² Fees in a number of marginal districts were abolished one year earlier. As the intake cohort of 1974 worked its way through the primary system, fees for the upper standards were successively abolished, starting with Standard 5 in 1978, so that by 1980 the entire primary schooling sequence was fee-free.

cohorts moved through the primary cycle, enrolment increases in the upper standards were modest. From the limited evidence available, it seems that schools found it difficult to raise sufficient funds through community-based contributions, and so gradually returned to parent-based levies.

However during the late 1980s, with prompting from the IMF and World Bank, the government introduced a cost-sharing programme, which effectively re-instated the requirement for parents to contribute directly to school funds. Each school set its own contribution level through its management committee. Typically the contribution consisted of two components: a lump sum, payable when the family first enrolled a child at the school, and smaller regular payments by the term or by the year.

An extended period of enrolment stagnation ensued: intakes to Standard 1 stayed on a plateau, and primary dropout rates remained high; higher in fact than they had been during the first post-Independence decade, before the first FPE initiative. The patterns remained essentially unchanged until, after the installation of the new government led by President Kibaki in 2002, the third FPE initiative was launched.

1.2 The present study

The aim of this study is to explore a variety of issues connected with the implementation of FPE in 2003 and the years following. These can usefully be consolidated around three main themes.

- 1. Enrolments and student flows.** What impact did FPE have on intakes to primary education and on flows through the school system? How, and for what reasons, did the effects vary from school to school?
- 2. Equity.** What were the equity effects of FPE? To what extent did it benefit young people from marginalized communities or underprivileged families?
- 3. Personal experience.** What personal effects did FPE have on the pupils experiencing it?

The study was carried out in a total of 17 primary schools, located in four districts of Kenya. Each school was visited for one or two days, during July and August, 2007. Districts and schools were selected purposively, to provide as wide a variation in key contextual variables as could be achieved with the resources available.

The districts selected were:

- 1. Nairobi City.** The capital city and by far the largest urban area in Kenya; with an extensive, well-developed primary education infrastructure.
- 2. Nyeri.** A rural district with high agricultural potential, situated relatively close to Nairobi, and with a long-established, well-developed primary education infrastructure.
- 3. Kisii.** A rural district of high agricultural potential, but situated far from any major urban area, and with a relatively less-developed primary education infrastructure.

4. Kajaido. A district of low agricultural potential, mainly devoted to pastoralism, and again with a relatively less-developed primary education infrastructure.

For practical reasons the fieldwork was divided between the two principal research workers. This report will focus on results for Nairobi City and Nyeri District. A separate report for Kisii and Kajaiado districts has been prepared³.

During preliminary planning for the study, a rather complex model for capturing pupil-flow data was developed. Using school registers and attendance records, the pupils entering Grade 1 in the years 2000 and 2003 (the FPE year) would be ascertained. Working forwards, these pupils would be followed through to 2007, and critical incidents in their schooling histories (repetition, dropout, transfer to another school) ascertained. The basic data from the school records would be supplemented by information from teachers, siblings, classmates, and the pupils themselves. In addition, information would be sought for all pupils who had joined the cohorts since Grade 1, through repetition, school re-entry, or transfer from another school. The data would come from essentially the same sources, but working back from the current year to the year in which the pupil first joined the cohort.

In the event, however, this strategy proved impossible to implement, because the necessary school records were incomplete, inaccurate, or in some cases missing altogether. Hence it was necessary to adopt a much-simplified approach. The attempt to follow individual pupils through the schooling sequence was abandoned; instead, the data collected were restricted to simple counts of total student numbers, broken down by grade, gender and year.

So in the final fieldwork programme, information was collected at three main levels:

1. School-level enrolment data. Enrolment by class and gender, for as many years back as the school had viable records. Cohort survival curves for each school were constructed, similar to the national curves analyzed in a previous CREATE monograph⁴.

2. Pupil-level background data. Responses to a structured questionnaire, administered to random samples of pupils in Standard 5 and Standard 8.⁵ The questions asked included socioeconomic background (guardian's occupation, education); family size, and schooling history. The sampled pupils from the two standards were assembled in separate classrooms, where the questions were explained one at a time – in English or Kiswahili, or most often in a mixture of both languages. A team of two or three checked responses as the pupils wrote them, and provided individual help as needed.

³See Oketch, M. (forthcoming) *Tracing Pupils in Kenyan Schools: Assessing the Impact of Free Primary Education Policy*. CREATE Fieldwork Report. Falmer and London: CREATE and Institute of Education, University of London. Available online from www.create-rpc.org.

⁴Somerset, A. (2007) *A Preliminary Note on Kenya Primary School Enrolment Trends over Four Decades*. CREATE Pathways to Access Research Monograph No. 9. Falmer: CREATE and University of Sussex. Available from www.create-rpc.org.

⁵List samples of pupils in each standard were drawn using attendance registers. The sampling fraction was varied according to the total number of pupils in the standard, to yield a sample of approximately 30 pupils. However in cases where the total number of pupils was fewer than 60, we applied the questionnaire to the full group, feeling that it would be invidious to exclude a minority from the exercise.

3. Pupil-level autobiographical data. The same samples of Standard 5 and Standard 8 pupils were asked to write life histories. Semi-structured guidelines were written on the blackboard and reinforced orally:

Please write an essay telling us about the story of your life. Tell us something about your life at home and your life at school. Tell us about the things that have made you happy and the things that have made you sad. And tell us something about your hopes for the future.

We stressed that everyone was free to answer as they chose. The responses the pupils produced varied widely: in length (from under 100 words to well over 500 words), in quality, and in content. Some pupils answered very much as they might for a school composition, covering each of the topics indicated in the guidelines in turn. Many more, however, focused on matters of particular concern to them. Most pupils included an account of their schooling, including in many cases the impact FPE had had on them. In so doing they provided numerous insights which would not have been difficult, if not impossible, to gain through any other approach.

Although the Level 2 (pupil background) and Level 3 (autobiographical) data were sought from both Standard 5 and Standard 8 pupils, we found that in some schools the Standard 5 pupils experienced considerable difficulties in responding. Many, for example, were unsure as to their parent's educational level, or even their occupation. Similarly some had not mastered English prose writing skills sufficiently well to be able to write a coherent life story. For this reason the account which follows focuses mainly on the Standard 8 data, although passages from the Standard 5 life stories are occasionally quoted.

At the beginning of each school visit we interviewed the principal, and usually the deputy principal as well. We explained the purpose of our study, and invited them to raise issues concerning the running of the school, and in particular the implementation of the Free Primary Education programme. The discussions were often wide-ranging. We also sought information concerning: pre-school provision, recruitment policies including transfers to and from other schools, repetition, the availability of textbooks and other teaching materials, buildings maintenance, tuition, school meals, repetition, and the experience of last year's Standard 8 graduates in gaining secondary school places.

During each visit we also observed a small number of lessons (usually between two and four, depending on the time available) in Standards 5 and 8. However these lessons are not discussed in this report.

In the three chapters which follow we focus, in turn, on information from each of our three main sources. We start, in Chapter 2, with the enrolment data.

Chapter 2 The Impact of Free Primary Education on Enrolments at the Case-Study Schools

2.1 Introduction

In this chapter we introduce each of our case-study schools in turn, starting with the four in Nairobi City, followed by the five in Nyeri district. We begin by analyzing the school's response to the introduction of Free Primary Education (FPE) in 2003 as indicated by cohort survival curves constructed from historical enrolment data. As we shall see, the curves provide striking evidence of the differentiated effects of the FPE initiative. In some schools, FPE produced massive enrolment increases; in others there was no apparent impact.

This is followed by a brief description of the school's physical facilities, together with a discussion of the geographic, economic and social environment within which it functions. Finally we analyze success in the Kenya Certificate of Primary Education (KCPE), the crucial examination which regulates access to secondary school, and hence determines almost single-handedly the school's standing, among parents, administrators and the community in general.

2.2 The four Nairobi City schools

From the outset of the study, it was clear that it would be quite impossible for us to select a group of just four schools to represent the wide diversity of primary schools in Nairobi City in any meaningful way. Instead we sampled purposively, our aim being to cover as wide a range of social and economic contexts as we could, within the limitations of the resources available to us. With the help of professionals at the Nairobi City Education Department, we identified the following schools, three public and one private, for the study:

1. **Tangazo.** A public school located on the peripheries of a major low-income informal housing area, drawing most of its pupils from that area.
2. **Majani.** A public school located in a high-income area, but drawing most of its pupils from low-income families.
3. **Kisasa.** An ex-high cost (Schedule C) public school, located in a high-income area and drawing most of its pupils from high-income families.
4. **Starlight Academy.** A proprietor-owned private school, located in Nairobi's peri-urban at the boundary between the city and Kiambu District.

It is not difficult to identify major gaps in the coverage we achieved through this selection. In particular, it would have been invaluable to include a public school serving low-income families living in one of the large formal housing estates to the east of the city centre.

2.2.1 Tangazo school

At Tangazo school, situated on the outskirts of a large shanty-town on the periphery of Nairobi City, the impact of the introduction of Free Primary Education (FPE) in 2003 was massive, as can be seen from the cohort curves in Figure 2.1. The Standard 1 class nearly quadrupled in size, from below 100 in 2002 to nearly 350 in 2003. Similarly enrolments in

the earlier cohorts which had entered the school between 1999 and 2002 were all substantially augmented. The 2002 intake cohort, for instance, jumped from 89 in St 1 (2002) to 231 in St 2 (2003), an increase of 160%. Likewise the 2000 intake cohort, survivors from which are currently (2007) in St 8, rose from 110 in St 4 to 245 in St 5 (123%). The total school roll almost doubled; from 943 in 2002 to 1,766 in 2003.

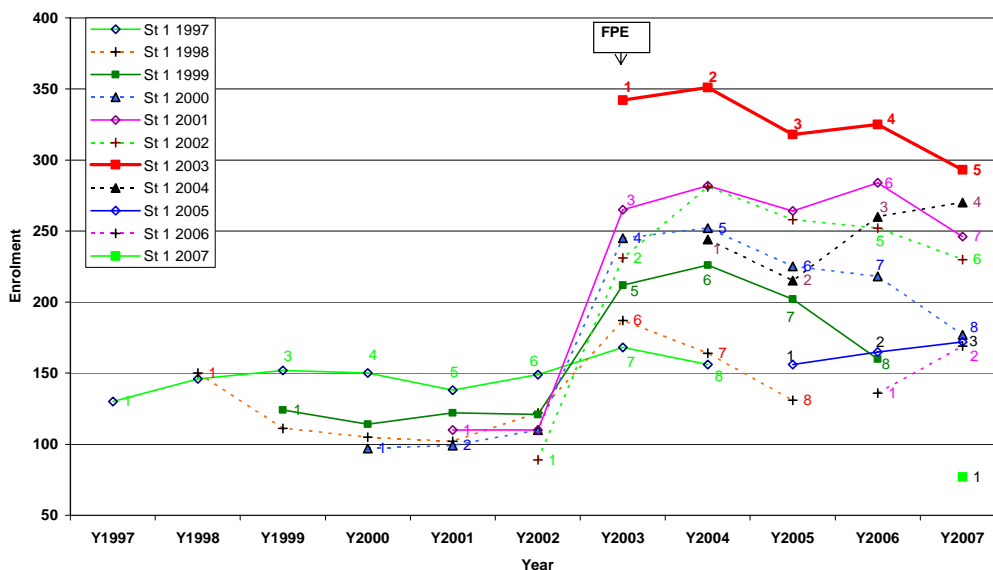
Despite the intense pressure on resources created by this massive surge, Tangazo school has succeeded in retaining most of the new recruits who enrolled in the FPE year through to 2007. The Standard 1 FPE cohort, now in Standard 5, still numbers nearly 300; down less than 20% from its original level. Enrolments in the two previous cohorts, now in Standards 6 and 7, have similarly held up well.

But over the same period, new entrants to Standard 1 have fallen away dramatically. Intakes halved between 2003 and 2005, and then halved again to 2007. The 2007 Standard 1 enrolment amounts to just 77; only 23% of the 2003 enrolment, and substantially lower than it was in any of the five years immediately preceding FPE.

Because of these trends, there is currently (2007) a marked 'FPE bulge' passing through the middle standards. Total enrolments in Standards 4, 5 and 6 are nearly double those in Standards 1, 2 and 3. In 2004, by contrast, the bulge was still in the junior classes: total enrolments in Standards 1 to 3 were more than 60% higher than those in Standards 6 to 8.

These distorted, rapidly-changing enrolment patterns create substantial management problems. On the day of our visit, about 70 pupils were crowded into each of the four Standard 5 classrooms. The desks, each shared by several pupils, took up most of the available floor space, leaving little room for the teacher and making access to the back of the classroom difficult. Many desk tops were in dilapidated condition so that usable writing space was at a premium. Textbooks were available, but were in short supply: typically, one book was shared between two to three pupils.

Fig 2.1 Nairobi City: Tangazo Primary School Cohort Curves
Intakes 1997 to 2007



In marked contrast, classroom environments in the junior classes were much more supportive of effective teaching and learning. The three 2007 Standard 1 classes each consisted of no more than 28 pupils. Each child had his or her own desk; and broad aisles between the desks made it easy for teachers to move around the room and supervise written work. A substantial space clear of desks was available for group activities. Each classroom contained a library cupboard, generously stocked with well-used English and Kiswahili readers. Standard 1 teaching had finished for the day at the time of our visit, but in one of the classrooms a number of pupils had stayed behind after the teacher had left, and were busy with self-generated learning activities: reading library books or working number problems on the chalkboard⁶.

Almost certainly, the reputation for overcrowding which Tangazo school acquired with the implementation of FPE has been largely responsible for the subsequent sharp reduction in demand for Standard 1 places. However this negative reputation has led to a paradoxical reversal: far from being overcrowded and underprovided, the Standard 1 classrooms now present pupils with a physical and material environment which is more conducive to effective learning than that available in many more-popular schools.

Despite its location on the margin of an extensive slum area, Tangazo School presents a pleasant facade to the world. The newly-painted gates carry a prominent welcoming message; inside, the walls of a large courtyard are covered almost entirely by brightly-coloured murals, including a number from donor agencies, national and international, which have assisted the school in various ways. The classroom blocks are solidly constructed, although those at the back of the compound, away from the front courtyard, are in need of maintenance. A grassy field provides an extensive play area.

In the Kenya Certificate of Primary Education (KCPE), Tangazo school is not a high achiever. Tangazo candidates averaged 229 standard score points in the 2006 examination, down more than six points from the previous year. In the Nairobi public-school league table, Tangazo ranked in the third quartile (131st place among 192 schools), but in the table for all schools, private as well as public, Tangazo's ranking was within the bottom quartile (304th among 396).

2.2.2 Majani School Error! Bookmark not defined.

The impact of FPE at Majani was second only to that at Tangazo among our case-study schools. Figure 2.2 shows the cohort curves. The Standard 1 intake, which had been gently falling year-on-year between 1998 and 2002, more than doubled in 2003 to just below 100; while earlier cohorts which had entered the school between 1999 and 2002 were all augmented by similar proportions. The total school roll jumped from 391 in 2002 to 680 in 2003 – a rise of nearly 75%.

These increased enrolments were sustained in 2004, but since then most cohorts have declined. The FPE intake of 2003 has now (2007) lost about 30% of its original numbers. The Standard 1 intake fell back substantially in 2004 and then further in 2005, since when it has stabilised at levels comparable to those of the pre-FPE years. As a consequence of these

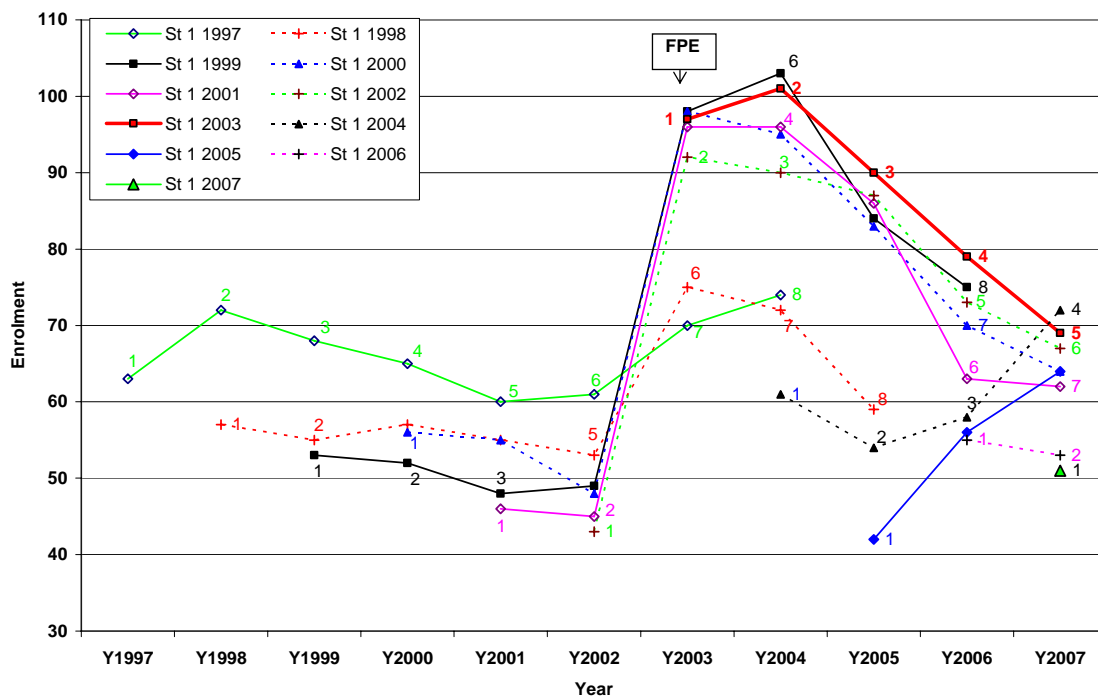
⁶ The class teacher, who we met in the staff room, regretted that she would lose touch with these pupils when they moved to Standard 2. She commented: 'if these children had a proper chance all the way through school, many of them could become scientists or doctors'.

trends, enrolments tend to be higher in senior classes than they are in junior classes, although the differences are much less striking than they are at Tangazo.

In contrast to Tangazo, Majani is situated in a high-income suburb of Nairobi. Despite its location, however, Majani is not a school for the elite. It was first established during the colonial period as a Schedule C school: that is, a school specifically designated for pupils of African origin – and the only type of school open to African pupils. The majority were the children of domestic workers: the cooks, *ayahs* (nursery maids), gardeners and *askari* (security guards) employed by the Europeans living in what was, at the time, a whites-only residential area. Schedule A schools provided education for European pupils in this racially-segregated system, while Schedule B schools catered for Asian pupils.

In 1961, just two years before Independence, racial segregation in the education system was abandoned: schools in all three schedules were made accessible to pupils from all ethnic groups. In practice, this meant that African pupils could enrol in ex-European and ex-Asian schools: movement of Europeans or Asians into ex-African schools was extremely rare.

Fig 2.2 Nairobi City: Majani Primary School Cohort Curves
Intakes 1997 to 2007



However the socioeconomic differentiation which had always underpinned the previous racially-based system remained essentially intact. Ex-European schools became high-cost schools; ex-Asian schools, medium-cost schools; and ex-African schools, low-cost schools. At the same time, in a cosmetic change of nomenclature, the Schedule A (high -cost) schools were re-named Schedule C schools, while the Schedule A schools became Schedule C schools. The fees for the high-cost schools were set at levels several times higher than those for the low-cost schools. So while the old racial barrier was dismantled, the economic barrier which had always accompanied it stayed firmly in place: only members of the newly-developing African elite could afford to send their children to the ex-European schools.

In keeping with its location in a high-income suburb, Majani provides a pleasant physical environment. The school is fronted by well-kept flower and vegetable gardens, while to the rear several massive trees provide shade alongside an extensive play area, large enough to include two football fields. The sturdy, two-story classroom blocks have recently been painted by a commercial firm in its rather gaudy colours, while a non-government organization has provided a new toilet block.

Despite these advantages, however, Majani still remains essentially a school for the poor, as it has been since pre-Independence times. Although many elite families live within the school's geographical catchment area, they choose to send their children elsewhere and usually further afield, to schools whose socioeconomic catchment they find more congenial.

One immediate reason why the disjunction between Majani's high-income location and low-income intake has proved so persistent is not difficult to identify: performance in the KCPE examination, governing access to secondary school, has been consistently mediocre. In the 2006 examination Majani candidates averaged 251; a little above the mid-point ranking for Nairobi public schools (82nd position among 192 schools) but well below the mid-point for all schools, public and private (232nd among 396). Thirty years ago the school's standing was similarly undistinguished: it typically ranked in the second or third quartile of the of the Nairobi league table, usually not far from the mid-point. High-status, well-educated parents are rarely prepared to entrust their children's education to a school which cannot demonstrate that it provides a learning environment, and outcome opportunities, at least as favourable as those the parents themselves enjoyed when they were at school.

It is interesting to speculate what the effects might have been if, at some time since Kenya's schools became multiracial, a principal of outstanding talents had been posted to Majani. Might such a principal have succeeded in breaking the vicious circle, with improving examination results leading to more high-income parents deciding that the school was suited to their children?⁷

2.2.3 Kisasa School

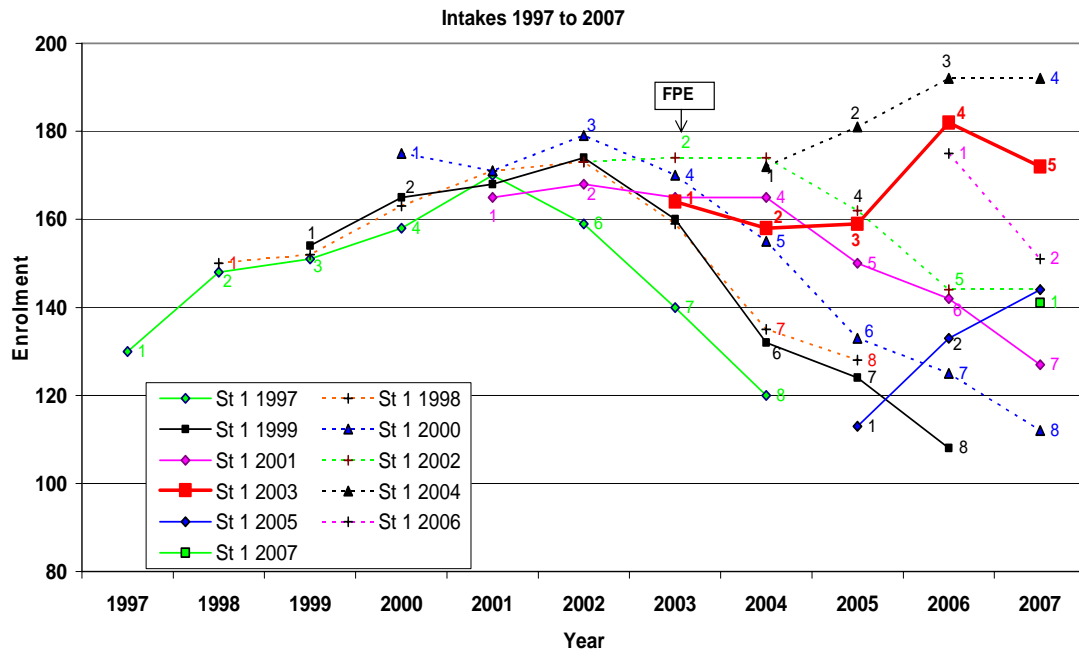
Our third Nairobi case-study school is Kisasa. The cohort curves, constructed from enrolment data back to the year 1997, are shown in Figure 2.3.

The contrast with the curves for Tangazo and Majani schools could hardly be more striking. Whereas the introduction of Free Primary Education in 2003 brought about massive effects at Tangazo and Majani, its impact at Kisasa was negligible - at least insofar as we can judge from the cohort curves. The intake to Standard 1, which doubled at Majani and quadrupled at Tangazo, actually *fell back* - from 173 in 2002 to 164 in 2003. Among the earlier cohorts, which had entered Kisasa before 2003, there were similar declines in most cases⁸. The total school roll dropped, from 1311 in 2002 to 1266 in 2003.

⁷ In the late 1970s a principal who had demonstrated exceptional skill in raising performance levels in a school located in a low-income suburb of Eastern Nairobi was in fact transferred to a school in a high-income area in the vicinity of Majani. However this school was an ex-European (Schedule C) school. The new principal, the first African to be appointed, held the post for more than two decades, during which time the school consistently ranked near the top of the KCPE league table.

⁸ The only exception was the 2002 St 1 cohort, which rose marginally between 2002 and 2003.

Fig 2.3 Nairobi City: Kisasa Primary School Cohort Curves



Since 2003, enrolments in most cohorts have continued to drift gently downwards, although a 2006 drive to recruit more pupils achieved some success in the lower grades. In 2007 the total school roll stood at 1184 – down 6% from 2003.

Kisasa, like Majani, is a long-established school with a history dating back to colonial times. Unlike Majani, however, Kisasa was originally reserved solely for pupils of European parentage. Along with the six other Europeans-only primary schools in Nairobi, Kisasa became a high-cost (Schedule C) school about two years before Independence – a status it retained until all primary school fees were abolished in 2003, making the formal distinction between high-cost, medium-cost, and low-cost schools obsolete. The last European pupils – and the last European teachers – left about 30 years ago. But over the entrance to the oldest classroom block the school’s original Latin motto is still displayed.

During the early colonial period the area where Kisasa School is situated was farming land reserved for Europeans, some distance outside the city boundary. With the growth of Nairobi, subdivision for housing began, but planning laws set a minimum plot size of two acres. In consequence the locality acquired – and largely still retains – a semi-rural rather than a suburban character.

The buildings at Kisasa, although extensive, present a rather dilapidated appearance, and most are in need of maintenance. Since the announcement that primary education would be ‘free’ from 2003 onwards, the parent-teacher association has been reluctant to provide financial support; while international organizations, local NGOs and commercial firms prefer to target their resources to schools such as Tangazo, which provide education for children from shanty-towns and low-income housing areas. Electricity and water bills have not been paid for some time, so these essential services have been cut off.

Along with the other Nairobi high-cost schools, Kisasa has traditionally been a high KCPE achiever. In the 2006 examination, the 107 candidates averaged a score of 309 points, placing the school just inside the top decile for Nairobi public schools (19th position among 192 schools) and just outside the top quartile for all schools, public and private (102nd among 396).

2.2.4 Starlight Academy SchoolError! Bookmark not defined.

For our case study of a Nairobi private school we selected Starlight Academy. Situated some distance to the north of Nairobi, Starlight Academy is a large, proprietor- owned school, offering both boarding and day facilities. The school is split into junior and senior sections, on two separate sites some distance from each other, with the boundary between Nairobi City and Kiambu Division in Central Province falling between them. The campuses are built to similar, space-saving designs: at each, three-story buildings take up the four sides of a rectangular plot, enclosing a small central courtyard which provides the only play area.

Unfortunately were unable to obtain enrolment data, contemporary or historic, for Starlight Academy, and so were unable to construct cohort survival curves. But the school is large and clearly very successful in attracting pupils. In the upper school there are three classes at each level, and classes are limited to 35 pupils –although at some levels this limit is stretched to 37. All classes are at present full, and there are waiting lists.

The school is likewise successful in the KCPE examination. In 2006, the school ranked in 17th position among approximately 450 schools, private and public, in the Kiambu division league table. The mean KCPE score was approximately 360. In 2007 the school will present 110 candidates for the examination.

Until quite recently, the area where Starlight Academy is situated was farming country. Now, however, with the arterial Nairobi-Thika road providing a powerful stimulus, the land is being subdivided into small plots, and burgeoning if haphazard housing and commercial development is rapidly transforming the locality into a northward extension of the Nairobi conurbation. Numerous small apartment blocks, typically three or four stories high, have recently been completed, and many more are under construction. This new housing is not intended for the poor: the rent for a modest, two-bedroom flat in a new block is likely to be in the region of Ksh 7,000 per month – more than one-third of the monthly salary of a qualified primary teacher.

2.3 The five Nyeri District schools

For our Nyeri field visits we originally selected the following four schools, three public and one private. As in Nairobi, our aim was to capture as wide a range of variation as we could with the resources available to us:

- 1. Mugunda.** A public school in a remote rural area of high agricultural potential, close to the Aberdare forest.
- 2. Kazi.** A public school in a small but rapidly expanding rural town, on the main road between Nyeri and Nairobi.
- 3. Nafasi.** A public school located in an area of mixed formal and informal housing in a low-income suburb of Nyeri town.

4. St Thomas. A mission-owned private school located in Nyeri town, on a site adjacent to Nafasi.

Two of the public schools were high KCPE performers, both scoring well above the Nyeri district mean in the 2005 and 2006 examinations; while the third was a much weaker performer, scoring below the district mean in both years.

While we were still in Nyeri, preliminary analysis indicated that, as far as could be judged from the cohort survival curves, none of the schools we had visited had shown any marked response to the introduction of FPE: certainly nothing comparable to the massive responses we had seen at Tangazo and Majani schools in Nairobi. Concerned that there might be high-response schools in the district which had slipped through the wide meshes of our light-sampling net, we decided to consult experienced local opinion. The professional staff we spoke to at the district office and elsewhere were all in agreement that the 2003 FPE programme had had little impact in Nyeri district as a whole, because there were few out-of-school children still to be reached. Enrolment rates were already much higher than in most other parts of Kenya.

However it was suggested to us that there were two local pockets of poverty within the district where FPE effects might be apparent: first, low-income housing areas in Nyeri town; second, parts of Mweiga division, an area to the north of Nyeri once part of the White Highlands, where landless African families had been settled around the time of Independence. We had already visited a Nyeri low-income urban school (Nafasi), but decided to add **Baraza school**, located in the Mweiga settlement area, to our sample.

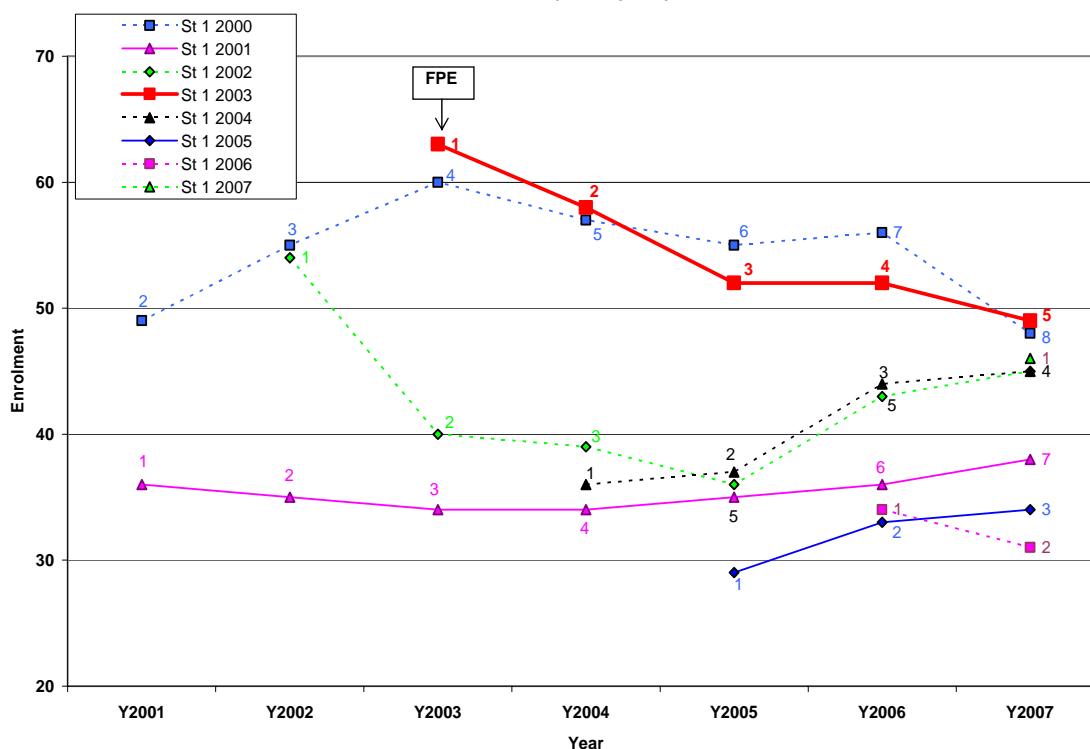
In the account which follows we shall discuss Mugunda and Baraza, the two rural schools, first.

2.3.1 Mugunda school

Mugunda is an isolated rural school, situated on the brow of a ridge running up into the Aberdare mountains at an altitude of about 2,500 meters. From the main teaching block there are spectacular views across a deep river valley and up into the Aberdare forests. Fertile volcanic soils, cool temperatures, and regular rainfall make the locality ideally suited to the cultivation of tea. Smallholder tea gardens blanket the hillsides, interspersed with small fields devoted to food crops and livestock.

In common with most other schools in Nyeri District, the response of Mugunda to the introduction of Free Primary Education was muted. The cohort curves are shown in Figure 2.4. Standard 1 enrolment rose from 54 in 2002 to 63 in 2003; but there had been a bigger increase the previous year. The 2000 intake cohort rose a little in the FPE year - from 55 (Grade 3) to 60 (Grade 4) - but the 2001 and 2002 cohorts both fell back.

Fig 2.4 Nyeri District: Mugunda Primary School Cohort Curves
Intakes 2000 (incomplete) and 2001 to 2007



An empty teaching block of six classrooms on the school compound gives testament to a long-term enrolment decline at Mugunda. The earliest year for which data are available is 2001, when the total enrolment amounted to 409. Since then rolls have dropped steadily - a trend which FPE in 2003 did nothing to interrupt. In 2007 the roll stands at 336.

Teachers and parents at Mugunda are adamant that this enrolment decline, and the lack of response to FPE, have nothing to do with attitudes to education. Mugunda parents, they insist, have been enthusiastic about schooling for many years, and community sanctions have ensured that even the most marginal families send their children to school. Rather, they ascribe the decline to the migration of young people away from the area in search of employment, leaving older people, many of them past child-bearing age, to care for the tea gardens. The establishment of new primary schools, both public and private, on sites within the boundaries of Mugunda's original catchment area, has also contributed.

Mugunda School has a long history. It was first established in the 1940s, as part of the challenge to the hegemony of the Government-supported mission system being mounted at the time by the Kenya Independent Schools Association (KISA). Funds for the buildings, and for paying the teachers, came entirely from self-help. A photograph on display in the staff room, taken in 1948 or 1949, shows a middle-aged Kenyatta taking part in a fund-raising meeting on the school site.

The original Mugunda competed for recruits with a long-established Protestant mission school several kilometres down the ridge. It achieved considerable success. By the early 1950s a number of its graduates had performed well enough in the Government selection examination to win places at the only public secondary school in Nyeri District open to

Africans at the time. However at the beginning of the Emergency in 1952, Mugunda together with other Independent schools throughout Central Province were closed by the Colonial government, which claimed that they were centres for political indoctrination and for recruitment to Mau Mau.

Mugunda re-opened in 1959, this time under the sponsorship of the nearby Protestant mission. Its first principal was one of the graduates of the original Mugunda. During the Emergency he had been recruited to a Government teachers' college, and was now a qualified primary teacher. With his vigorous, committed leadership, the school rapidly acquired a national reputation for examination achievement. For several years around the time of Independence it ranked top school in Nyeri District, and among the top half-dozen schools in the country⁹.

But Mugunda's high academic reputation was short-lived. Following the departure of the founding principal to start another (equally successful) career, examination performance was maintained for a few years, but then slipped into a long slow decline, reaching a nadir in the late 1970s, when Mugunda was for a time among the 20 lowest-scoring schools in the district. However the appointment of a new principal three years ago seems to be leading to something of a revival. Between 2005 and 2006 Mugunda's mean KCPE score rose sharply from 197 to 235 points, placing the school a little below the median rank for all schools in Nyeri District (248th among 478 schools).

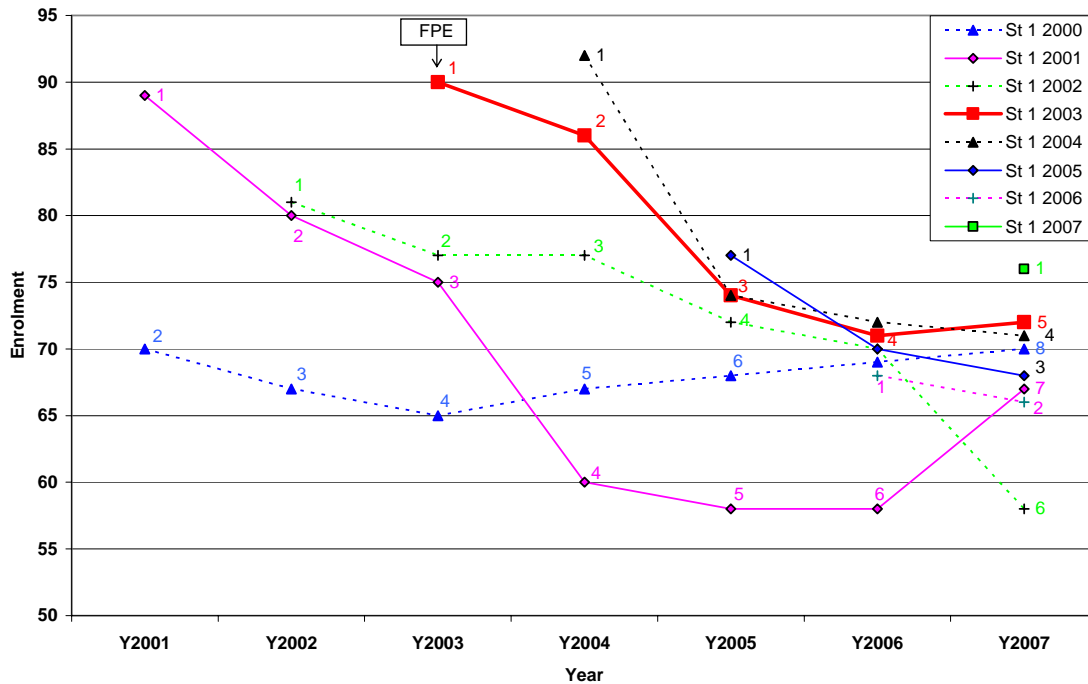
2.3.2. Baraza School

Like Mugunda, Baraza is an isolated rural school, but it is located in an area of much lower agricultural potential. Soils are stony, thin and less fertile, while rainfall is lower and less regular. Maize, together with cattle and small livestock, provide the main income sources. However the conditions seem well suited to the cultivation of onions, which are widely grown as a cash crop.

There was even less response to FPE at Baraza school than at Mugunda. Figure 2.5 shows the cohort survival curves. The 2003 Standard 1 intake numbered 90 - a little higher than the 2002 intake of 81, but not significantly different from the intakes of 2001 (89) or 2004 (92). Enrolments in Standards 2, 3 and 4 all dropped a little from the levels of the previous year.

⁹ In the Kenya African Preliminary Examination (KAPE); the examination which governed access to African secondary schools. Mugunda alumni from this period include a High Court judge, a prominent human rights lawyer, and two civil engineers.

**Fig 2.5 Nyeri District: Baraza Primary School Cohort Curves:
Intakes 2000 (incomplete) and 2001 to 2007**



As at Mugunda, the total number of children attending Baraza is in long-term decline. The roll stood at 957 in 1997, but by 2003 had dropped nearly 40% to just 585. Since then attrition has been more gradual: in 2007 the enrolment totalled 549.

Baraza school is located in Mweiga division, some 40 kilometres to the north of Nyeri Town. The land was originally occupied by Maasai pastoralists, whose territory extended through the Rift Valley to the Laikipia Plateau, and southwards towards Nyeri. Early in the twentieth century, however, the Colonial government moved the Maasai out of this huge area, to make room for European settlement¹⁰.

But the European presence in Mweiga was transitory. At around the time of Independence, most of the European farms which had been developed after the Maasai eviction were acquired by the new Government, and subdivided for settlement by African farmers. One of these farms, the Baraza Estate, gave its name to Baraza School. The original farm homestead now houses the school’s administration block.

The new landholdings that were created from the subdivision of this estate are relatively large: typically between 20 and 50 hectares. Some pupils attending Baraza School come from these farms; others from a large settlement of landless squatters situated just outside the school compound. Unlike the sturdy, stone-built administration block, the classrooms are built

¹⁰ A 1904 treaty between the Colonial Government and the Maasai guaranteed the Maasai occupancy of two ‘reserve’ areas - one on the Laikipia plateau to the north of Nyeri, the other in the south, along the Tanganyika border - ‘for as long as the Masai as a race shall exist’. Less than a decade later, however, when the potential of Laikipia for European settlement had become evident, Government forced the Maasai to accept a second treaty, by which they lost Laikipia in exchange for an enlarged – but lower-potential - southern reserve.

mainly from timber off-cuts, and are of flimsy construction. One classroom block stands empty.

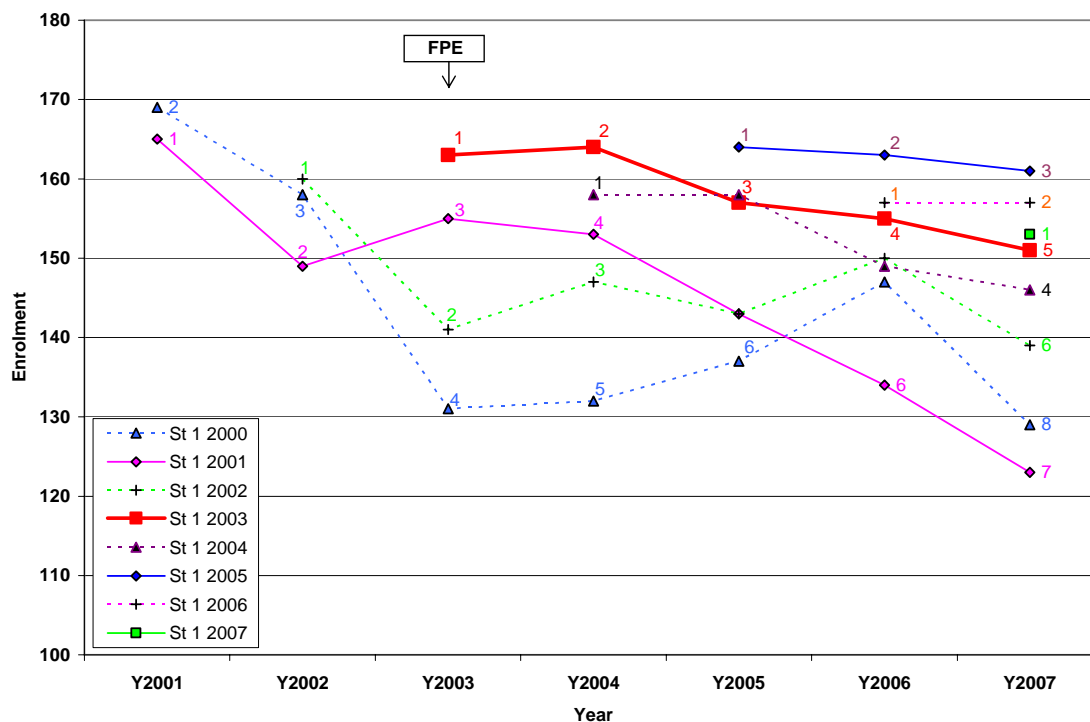
As measured by the Kenya Certificate of Primary Education examination, Baraza is the weakest among our nine case-study schools by a considerable margin. It is also one of the weakest in Nyeri District. In the 2006 examination, Baraza’s mean score of 172 ranked it only seven places from the bottom of the Nyeri league table (479th place among 486 schools).

2.3.3 Kazi school

Kazi is a long-established semi-urban school, situated near the centre of a thriving town some 30 km to the south of Nyeri. Because of its location at the junction of several arterial roads, the town has long been a major trading centre for agricultural produce. Its market is one of the largest in Kenya. A recent construction boom is rapidly transforming the appearance of the town, lining the main road with a heterogeneous array of new buildings: modern banks, petrol pumps and mini-supermarkets interspersed among more traditional stone-built shops, restaurants, and low-cost hotels.

From the Kazi cohort curves shown in Figure 2.6, little if any evidence of a response to FPE in 2003 can be discerned. The 2003 Standard 1 intake was 163 pupils – only a little above the median intake of about 160 pupils per year between 2001 and 2007 (the range is from 165 in 2001 and 164 in 2005, to 151 in 2007). One of the earlier cohorts gained a few pupils in 2003, but two others lost quite substantial numbers. Since 2003 the FPE cohort has lost only about 10% of its original numbers. Attrition rates from earlier cohorts were roughly similar.

Fig 2.6 Nyeri District: Kazi Primary School Cohort Curves
Intakes 2000 (incomplete) and 2001 to 2007



Total enrolments at Kazi do not show the steady declines we have seen at Mugunda and Baraza in recent years. After a sharp – and unexplained – drop from 1272 in 2001 to 1045 in

2002, numbers have climbed gradually year-on-year, reaching 1159 in 2007. Kazi has clearly been a popular school over the past five years.

Kazi school presents a workaday, rather than an attractive, appearance to the visitor. The front courtyard is bare of grass through heavy usage, and becomes very muddy after rain. There are few flowers, and playing space is restricted. The two-story classroom blocks are solidly built of permanent materials, but the rusty corrugated iron roofs are in need of repair, and no maintenance has been carried out for several years. The principal explained that the parent-teacher association is supportive, and has agreed to fund the necessary work through a levy. Since the inception of the FPE programme, however, he must seek authority from the district office before parents can be asked to make any contribution to the running of the school. He has submitted an application, but is still awaiting a response.

Despite its somewhat dilapidated appearance, there is nevertheless an unmistakable air of purpose about Kazi school. Outside the staffroom a large board displays four sets of mathematics problems – one set for each of the four upper standards. Pupils are encouraged to work through the appropriate problems in their own time, and then to check their results with their teacher. New problems are posted regularly. Another board displays a letter from a girl who graduated from the school last year, and is now a first-year student at the oldest, most prestigious, girls' secondary school in the Republic.

It is not surprising, then, that Kazi school is a high performer in the KCPE examination. In 2006, candidates averaged 334 points, which placed the school in 6th position among the 373 public schools in Nyeri District, and in 50th position among all 478 schools, private as well as public.

2.3.4 Nafasi School

Nafasi school is situated in an area of mixed formal and informal housing, a short distance from the centre of Nyeri town. Like Kazi, Nafasi is a long-established urban school, but serves a catchment which is different in significant ways. The town where Kazi school is located is essentially a farmers' town. Centred around its thriving market, it has grown to its present size through the services it provides for the families living in the surrounding rural hinterland. By contrast Nyeri, where Nafasi is located, is largely a government town. Established by the colonial authorities more than a century ago, it is the administrative centre both for Nyeri District, and for the much wider Central Province. It has grown in size as the reach and scope of government administration has expanded. In consequence, Nyeri provides a wider range of services than Kazi: services to meet the needs not only of nearby rural communities, but also those of civil servants.

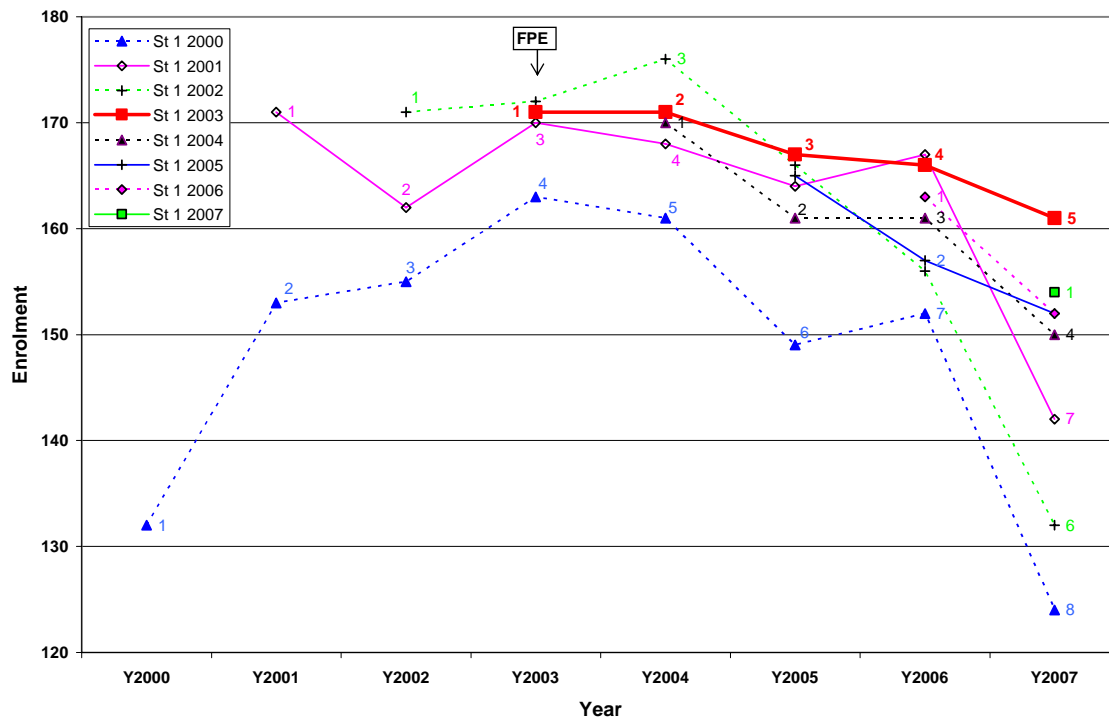
From the cohort curves shown in Figure 2.7, it is difficult to discern evidence that FPE had any more impact at Nafasi than it did at the other Nyeri schools we chose for our case studies. The intake to Standard 1 in 2003 changed scarcely at all from the levels of the two previous years, although the cohorts reaching Standards 2, 3 and 4 were all augmented a little, as was the total school roll. However the apparent survival rate in the FPE intake cohort through to Standard 5 has been an impressive 94%; in consequence, the Standard 5 class is currently (in 2007) the largest class at the school.

In its outward appearance, Nafasi is rather similar to Kazi. The teaching blocks, although serviceable, are in need of maintenance and repair, and lighting within some of the

classrooms is poor. As at Kazi, the spaces between the teaching blocks are unpaved, and become very muddy during the rainy season.

KCPE performance levels are also not dissimilar. Kazi, as we have seen, was one of the five highest-achieving public schools in Nyeri district in the 2006 examination. Nafasi candidates also performed creditably. They achieved a mean score of 286, which placed the school in 18th position among the 373 public schools in the district, and within the top quartile among all schools, private as well as public (104th position among 478 schools).

Fig 2.7 Nyeri District: Nafasi Primary School Cohort Curves
Intakes 2000 to 2007



2.3.5 St Thomas School

For our Nyeri private-school case study, we selected St Thomas, a mission-owned school situated on a campus adjacent to that of Nafasi. Despite this proximity, however, St Thomas presents a very different appearance. A neat forecourt with pleasant gardens leads to a set of school buildings which was easily the most imaginatively designed of all those we saw during our school visits. A covered corridor connects several wide central spaces, each of which gives access to several hexagonal-shaped classrooms on two levels. The classrooms, spacious and with abundant natural lighting from large windows, are separated from each other, so noise interference is reduced to a minimum.

At present, however, these attractive facilities are massively underutilized. Designed for a double-stream enrolment of 600-700, the total roll is currently 160 pupils, of whom 86 are boarders. Class numbers range from 34 pupils in Standard 7 to eleven in Standard 1, with a total of fewer than 40 pupils in the three lowest classes.

