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

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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 documents[1], 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 abolished[2]. 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 though 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 extend 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 Kajiado districts has been prepared[3].

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 monograph[4].

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.

[3]See 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.

[4] Somerset, 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.

[5] List 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 Error! Bookmark not defined.

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.

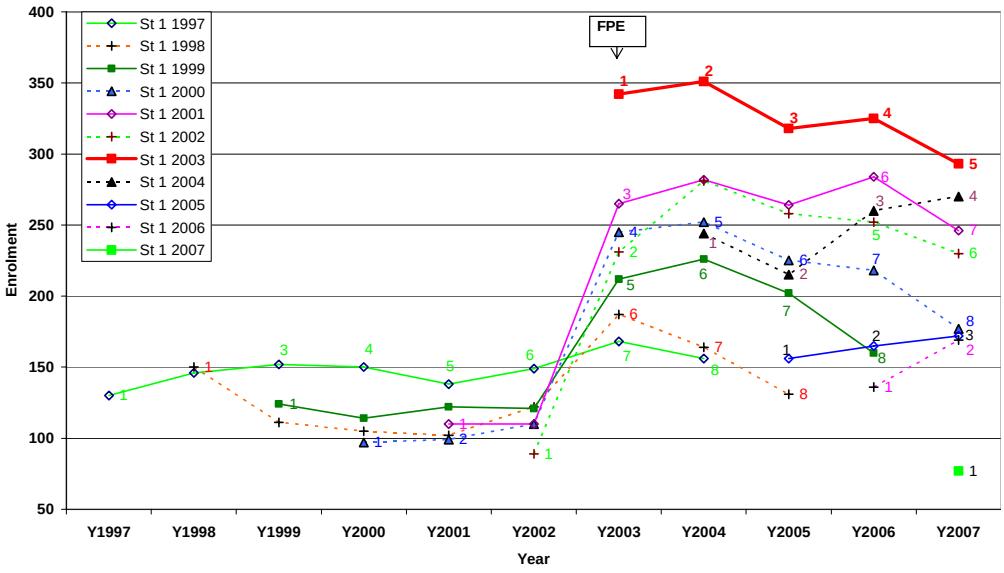
Despite the intense pressure on resources created by this massive surge, Tangazo school has succeeded in retaining most of the new recruits who enrolled in the FPE year through to 2007. The Standard 1 FPE cohort, now in Standard 5, still numbers nearly 300; down less than 20% from its original level. 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 chalkboard[6].

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

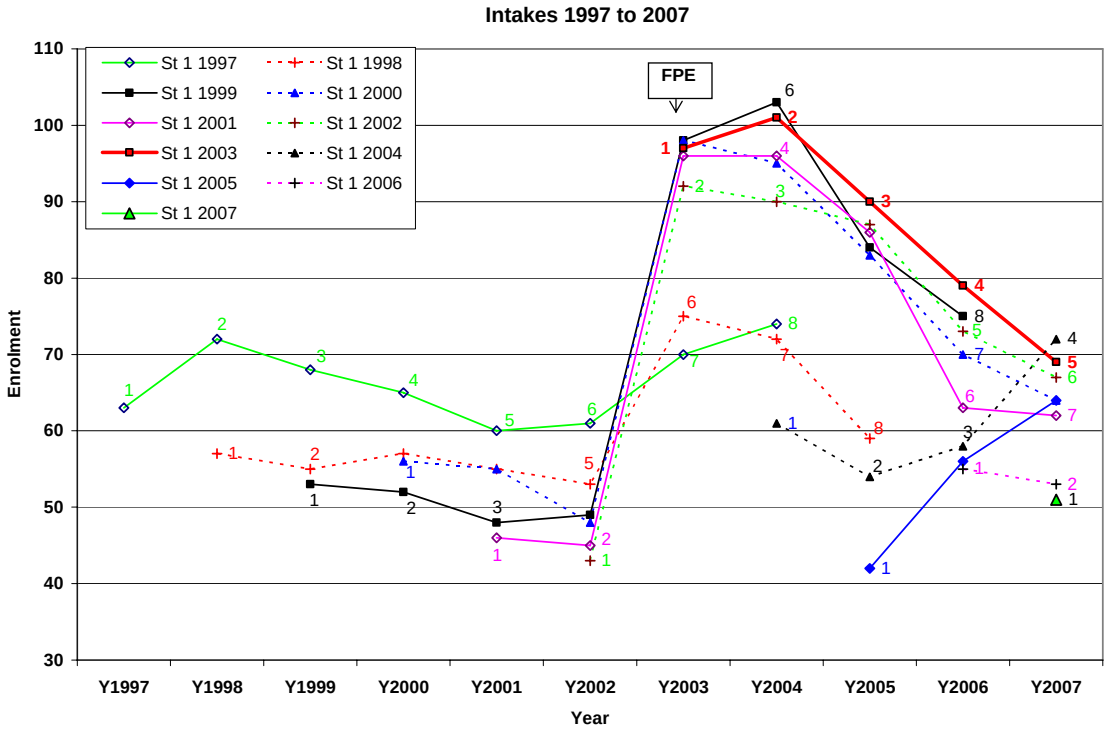
[6] The class teacher, who we met in the staff room, regretted that she would lose touch with these pupils when they moved to Standard 2. She commented: 'if these children had a proper chance all the way through school, many of them could become scientists or doctors'.

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



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

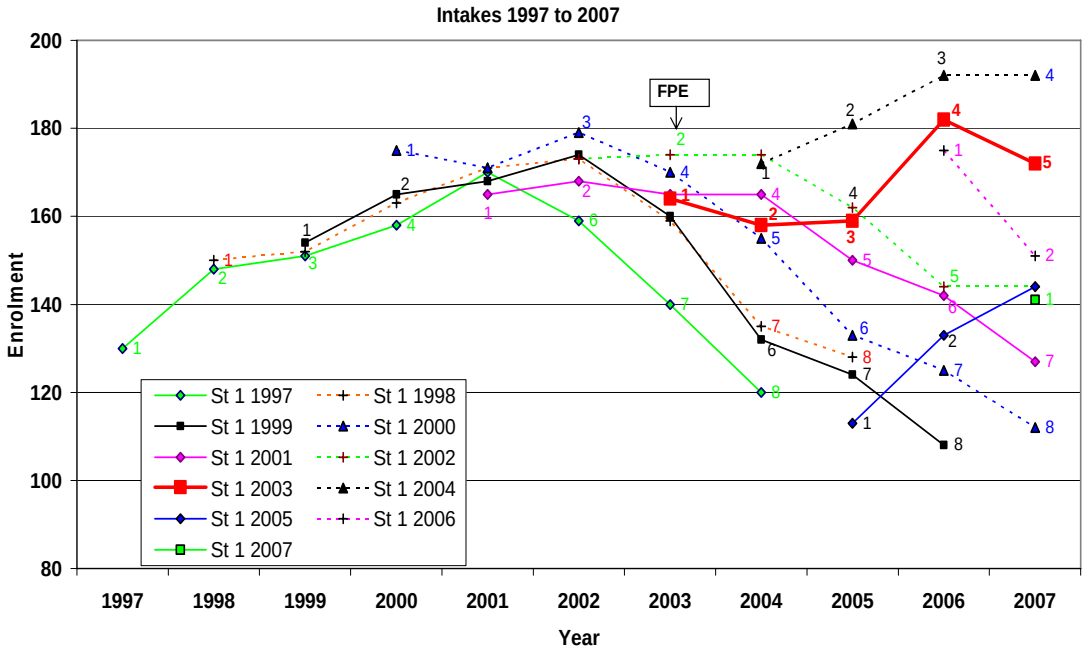
Our third Nairobi case-study school is Kisasa. The cohort curves, constructed from enrolment data back to the year 1997, are shown in Figure 2.3.

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 cases[8]. 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 School Error! 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.

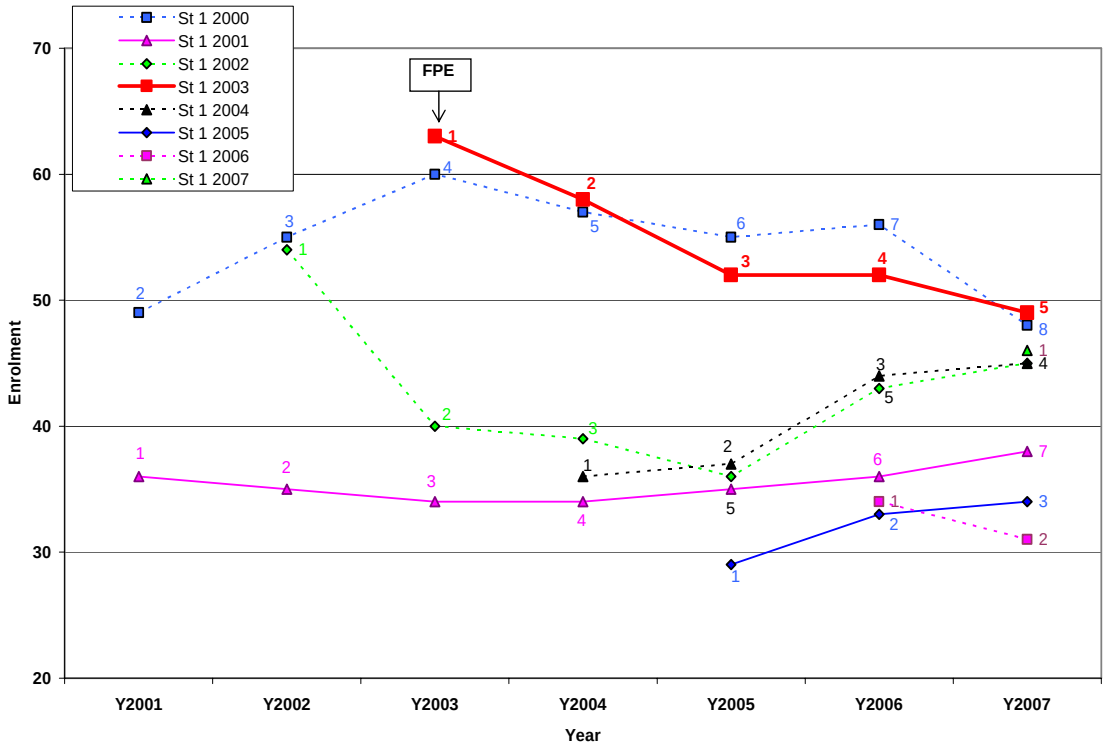
In the account which follows we shall discuss Mugunda and Baraza, the two rural schools, first.

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 country[9].

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).

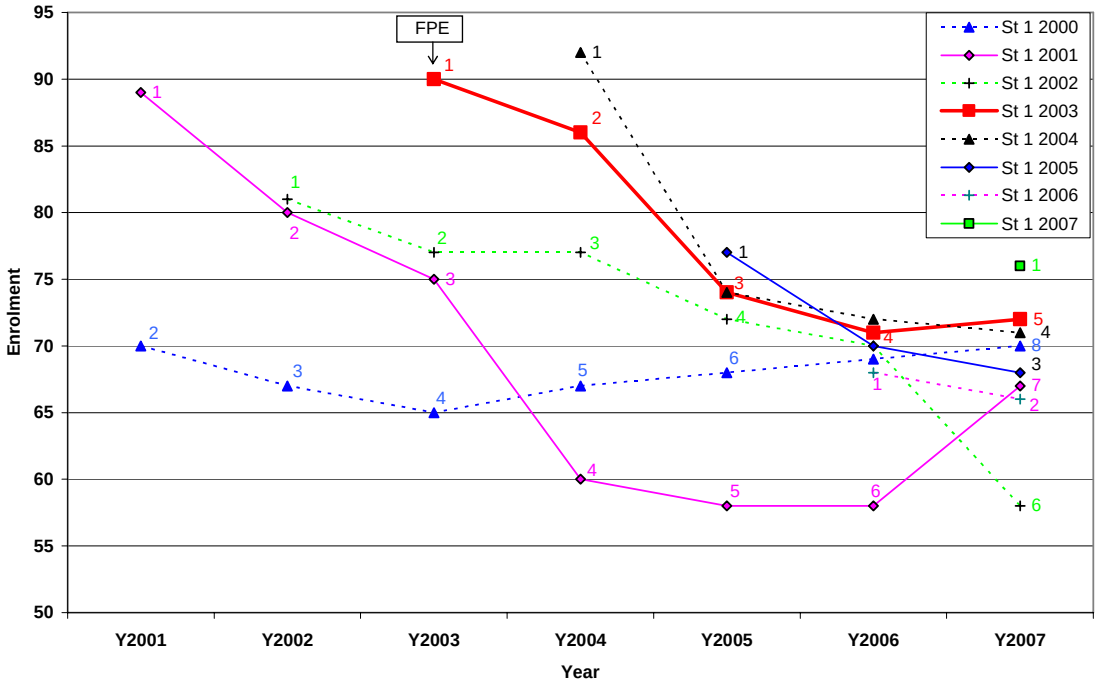
2.3.2. Baraza School

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 Laikipea 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 settlement[10].

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.

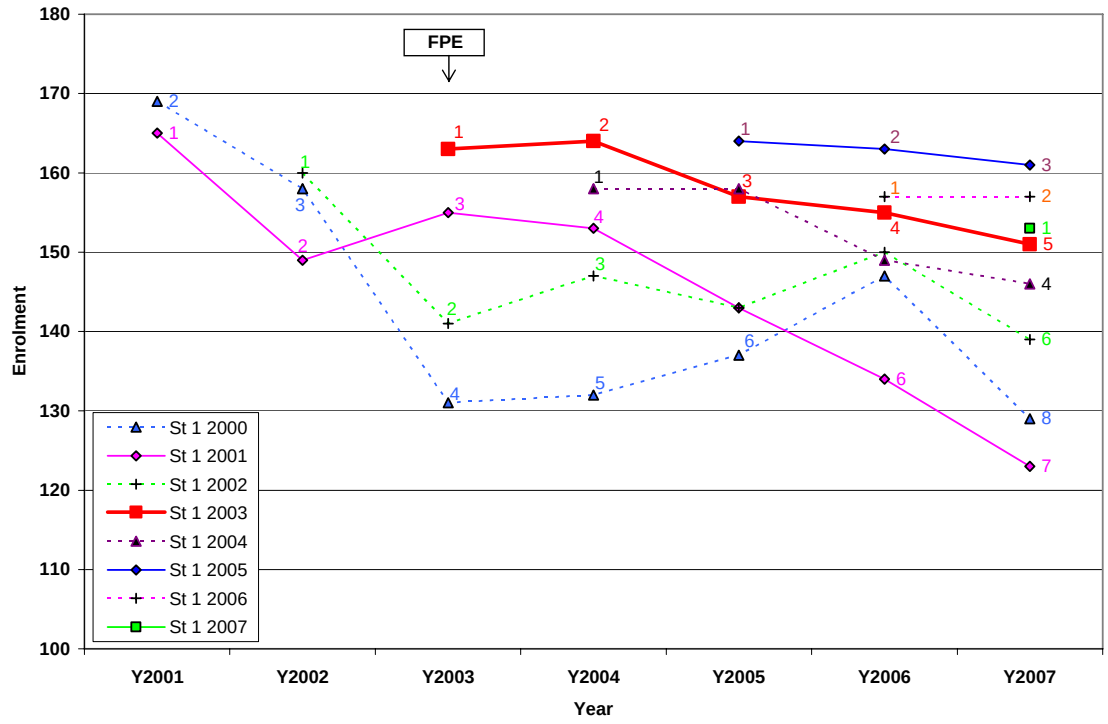
As measured by the Kenya Certificate of Primary Education examination, Baraza is the weakest among our nine case-study schools by a considerable margin. It is also one of the weakest in Nyeri District. In the 2006 examination, Baraza's mean score of 172 ranked it only seven places from the bottom of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

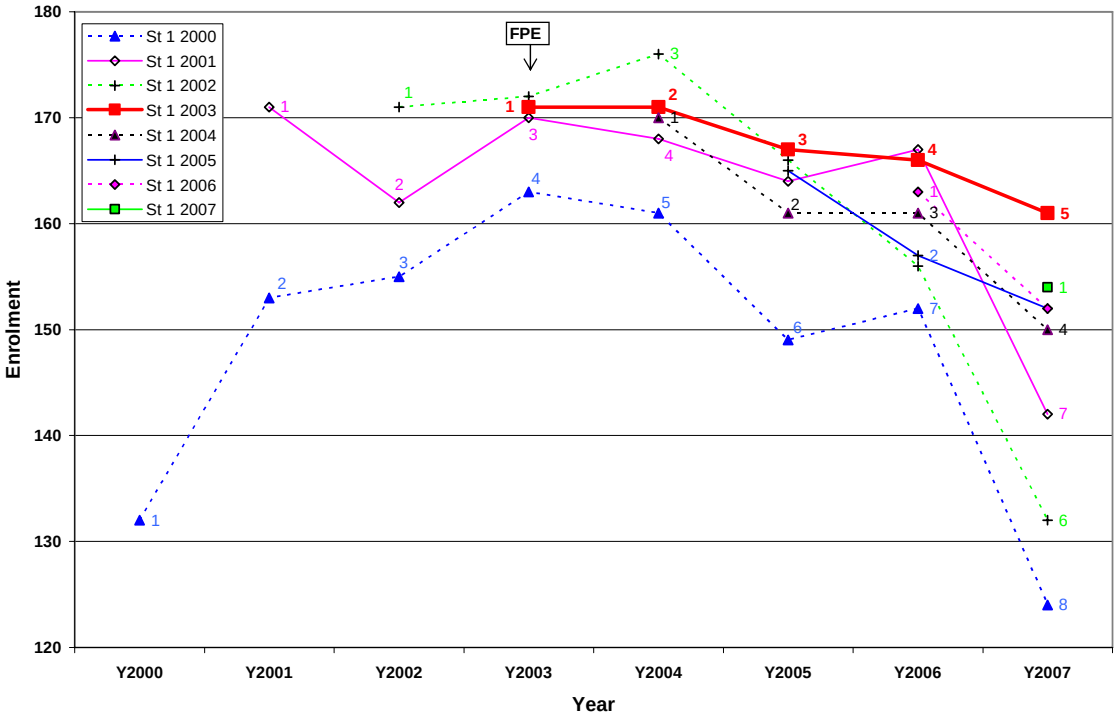
From the cohort curves shown in Figure 2.7, it is difficult to discern evidence that FPE had any more impact at Nafasi than it did at the other Nyeri schools we chose for our case studies. The intake to Standard 1 in 2003 changed scarcely at all from the levels of the two previous years, although the 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.

Enrolment data for previous years were unfortunately not available, so we have been unable to construct cohort survival curves. However every informant we spoke to confirmed that for a number of years the roll has been eroding steadily. In 2006 the school presented 37 candidates for the KCPE examination; in 2007, the number will be 27. Enrolment losses were particularly heavy in 2003, when many pupils transferred to public schools (including several to Nafasi next door) to take advantage of Free Primary Education. Since 2003, however, most transfers have been to other private schools.

Teacher losses from St Thomas have also been substantial. In the past twelve months four experienced teachers have left to take up positions at public schools, where salaries are higher and tenure is assured. A new teacher recruit, trained but inexperienced, told us:

> 'I'm getting about one-third of a Teachers' Service Commission salary. But I'm lucky – if I was working at a proprietor-owned school, I'd be earning even less.'

Fees at St Thomas are relatively modest: Kshs. 10,500 per term for boarders; 6,350 for day pupils, including lunch. At other Nyeri private schools fees can be much higher: up to Kshs. 25,000 for boarders is not uncommon.

Many factors are likely to have contributed to the enrolment decline at St Thomas, but among these, performance in the KCPE examination is clearly central. Judged against all schools in Nyeri District, public as well as private, St Thomas's performance is quite creditable. In 2006, the school ranked 74th among 479 schools, and averaged 312 points, compared with the district average score of 249.20.

However when compared with other private schools – a more meaningful criterion for parents with the resources to consider private education for their children – St Thomas's status is less impressive. In the 2006 examination, as many as 102 private schools offered KCPE candidates in Nyeri district. Among these, St Thomas ranked in 68th place – well below the half-way point in the league table. Given that parents have such a wide choice of more-successful private schools available to them, it is hardly surprising that St Thomas has been losing pupils in recent years.

Once pupil numbers begin to fall, a private school is in danger of entering a spiral of decline from which escape is difficult. Dropping numbers mean a constrained school budget and low teachers' salaries, resulting in low teacher morale and high teacher turnover. These in turn are likely to lead to less effective class teaching, and to poorer KCPE results. Furthermore, dropping numbers also mean that the school can no longer afford to be selective in deciding who to admit, which again is likely to impact adversely on KCPE results. As the principal of St Thomas explained:

> We are a non-selective school – we accept each and every student who applies. Many of the newcomers are very weak: some have been rejected by other (private) schools. . . . We interview students before they enrol, but it is only to discover which subjects they will need tutoring in. We give them extra tutorials in the evenings and on Saturdays.

While in Nyeri District we paid a short visit to another private school where it seemed clear that the same spiral of decline - falling enrolments and weak KCPE examination results reinforcing each other – was at work. Box 2.1 presents brief notes from this visit.

Box 2.1
Savannah: A failing private school

Savannah, a proprietor-owned private school, is situated in a semi-arid, thinly-settled zone some distance to the north of Nyeri town. The campus, virtually bare of grass at the time of our visit, is about two hectares in extent. The teaching block consists of eight small classrooms and an office, built of semi-permanent materials and fronted by a pleasant garden. There is also a dormitory block, now disused. The compound is surrounded by a cactus and bougainvillea hedge - an effective barrier against intruders when the gates are closed.

In 2007 total enrolment amounts to just ten pupils: five in Standard 8, two in St 7, three in St 6, and none at all in any of the lower standards. Numbers have declined dramatically in recent years. In 2005 the roll stood at 63, and in earlier years, when the boarding facilities were functioning, there were 'many more'. Because the locality is sparsely settled, most pupils walk substantial distances to school – one reason, we were told, why there are now no pupils in the lower standards.

The proprietor lives in Nairobi but visits regularly. Day-to-day running of the school is in the charge of a young P1 teacher, a recent (2006) graduate from a Government teachers' college. She is assisted by two untrained teachers. Her salary is Kshs 4000 per month. She would very much like to move to a public school, where she would receive at least four times as much. Knowing that competition for public-school posts is intense, she hopes that her experience at Savannah will give her an advantage when one becomes available.

The immediate reason for Savannah School's decline is not difficult to identify: Savannah's performance in the Kenya Certificate of Primary Education (KCPE) examination has been deteriorating. The preferred educational choice for most private primary-school graduates is entry to a high-ranking public secondary school – preferably a national school, or alternatively a well-regarded provincial school. Access to these schools is controlled by the KCPE. In 2006 Savannah's mean KCPE score was 298 - down 18 points from the previous year. Compared with Nyeri District as a whole this was quite a good result: the mean score for all Nyeri schools was 249.20, and Savannah ranked 85th among 479. However for a private school the performance of the district as a whole is largely irrelevant: what really counts is performance relative to other private schools. Measured against this yardstick, Savannah is a failing school. In 2006 it ranked 76th among 102 private schools; the previous year, it had ranked 50th among 91.

Fees at Savannah are just Ksh 4,500 per term: much lower than those charged at many other private schools, where fees for a day pupil can range up to Ksh 10,000 or higher. It seems that in recent years most Savannah parents have come to the conclusion that despite the low fees, the school offers poor value for money, and have moved their children elsewhere – probably to other private schools with better KCPE results.

Chapter 3 Home Backgrounds, Pupil Characteristics, and Schooling Histories: Questionnaire Responses at the Nine Case-Study Schools

3.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter we focused on school-level data concerning FPE and its impact; in this chapter and the one which follows it we turn our attention to pupil-level data. Table 3.1, on the following page, summarises the information garnered from the questionnaire responses of Standard 8 pupils at the four Nairobi and five Nyeri schools we visited.

It can be seen at a glance that there are wide differences among the schools. The average age of the pupils, for example, varies by nearly two years: from 15.23 years at Baraza to only 13.48 years at Starlight Academy. Similarly the proportion of pupils whose guardians work in manual occupations ranges from 79% at Majani to just 5% at St Thomas.

But there are, of course, patterns within these differences. The schools can be categorized very roughly into five groups, each with its characteristic profile. Four of the groups consist of two schools each, while the fifth group is made up of a single school, with a distinctive profile different from those of all other schools. Table 3.1 is arranged to highlight these contrasts.

The five groups of schools serve quite different socioeconomic and geographic clienteles:

Group 1. Nairobi City low-income schools (Tangazo, Majani)
Group 2. Nyeri District urban schools (Kazi, Nafasi)
Group 3. Nyeri District rural schools (Mugunda, Baraza)
Group 4. Nairobi City ex high-cost school (Kisasa)
Group 5. Private schools, Nairobi and Nyeri (Starlight Academy, St Thomas)

We shall discuss the salient features of the five school-group profiles in turn.

Table 3.1 Quantitative Indicators: Nairobi and Nyeri schools

Standard 8 pupils

	School groups								
	1. Nairobi low-income		2. Nyeri Urban		3. Nyeri Rural		4. Ex-high cost	5. Private	
	Tangazo	Majani	Kazi	Nyama-chaki	Mugunda	Baraza	Kisasa	Starlight Academy	Consol-ata
School characteristics:									
No of St 8 students (total)	177	64	129	124	49	70	112	110	27
No of St 8 students (sample)	30	52	32	32	47	26	31	54	27
Mean KCPE score 2006	229	251	329	286	235	172	309	c. 360	312
Home characteristics:									
% Guardians with post-prim educ.	53%	50%	88%	64%	36%	18%	93%	96%	100%
Guardian's occupation:									
White collar	3%	4%	53%	37%	4%	-	55%	59%	59%
Manual	73%	79%	16%	37%	13%	27%	9%	6%	7%
Self-employed	17%	10%	16%	9%	2%	15%	35%	35%	22%
Farmer	-	-	6%	-	60%	31%	-	-	-
Farm labourer	-	-	-	6%	15%	23%	-	-	-
Guardian's land:									
% owning agricultural land	48%	53%	85%	50%	75%	47%	83%	56%	86%
% landowners employing labourers	28%	11%	40%	25%	3%	19%	70%	60%	78%
% owning building plots (only)	-	-	-	-	-	-	3%	37%	-
Pupil characteristics:									
Mean age	14.88	14.71	13.65	13.81	14.32	15.23	13.87	13.48	13.77
Mean family size (full sibs only)	3.97	3.09	2.30	2.86	n.a.	2.94	2.53	n.a.	2.24
% pupils with father as guardian	70%	60%	69%	66%	87%	64%	87%	78%	58%
% repeaters (St 1-8)	33%	52%	42%	28%	49%	89%	15%	11%	43%
% enrolled this school since St 1	16%	29%	57%	43%	87%	68%	46%	17%	27%
% entering school in St 4 (FPE)	50%	33%	6%	3%	-	-	3%	8%	4%
Median years at this school	5.24	5.19	7.74	7.50	8.41	8.98	5.00	3.77	3.19
Median years, all schools	8.33	8.56	8.42	8.23	8.48	9.25	8.12	8.06	8.34

3.2 The five school-group profiles

3.2.1 Group 1. Nairobi City low-income schools

As will be remembered from the previous chapter, these schools (Tangazo, Majani) were the only two, among the seven public schools we visited, where the introduction of Free Primary Education in 2003 had a major impact on the cohort curves. Both schools draw their clientele almost entirely from low-income homes. The guardians of the Standard 8 pupils who completed our questionnaire are engaged predominantly in blue-collar, manual work (73%, 79%); very few (3%, 4%) have white-collar occupations. Nevertheless they are relatively well-educated: about half (53%, 50%) attended school past the primary level. Despite the fact that they live and work in a large and rapidly-growing city, links to the rural areas remain strong: substantial proportions (48%, 53%) of the guardians own agricultural land, worked mainly by family members rather than by hired labourers.

The Standard 8 pupils enrolled in these schools are on average older by about one year than those in other urban schools (14.88 years, 14.71 years), and they come from larger families (mean family size 3.97, 3.09)[11]. Substantial numbers (33%, 52%) have repeated one or more grades since they first enrolled, either at their current school or a previous school. Most have experienced unstable educational histories: on average, pupils have received only a little over half their primary education at their current school (medians, 5.24, 5.19); while only small minorities (16%, 29%) have been enrolled since Standard 1. High proportions (57%, 33%) entered the school in 2003, the FPE year.

Fig 3.1. Group 1: Nairobi low-income schools
Year of first enrolment at current school
(Standard 8 pupils)

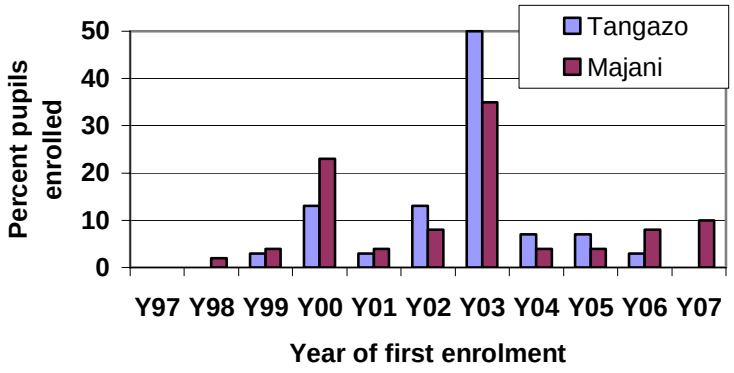


Figure 3.1 displays graphically the years in which the Standard 8 pupils first enrolled at these Nairobi low-income schools. The graphs are strikingly similar: recruits in 2003, the

[11] Full siblings only.

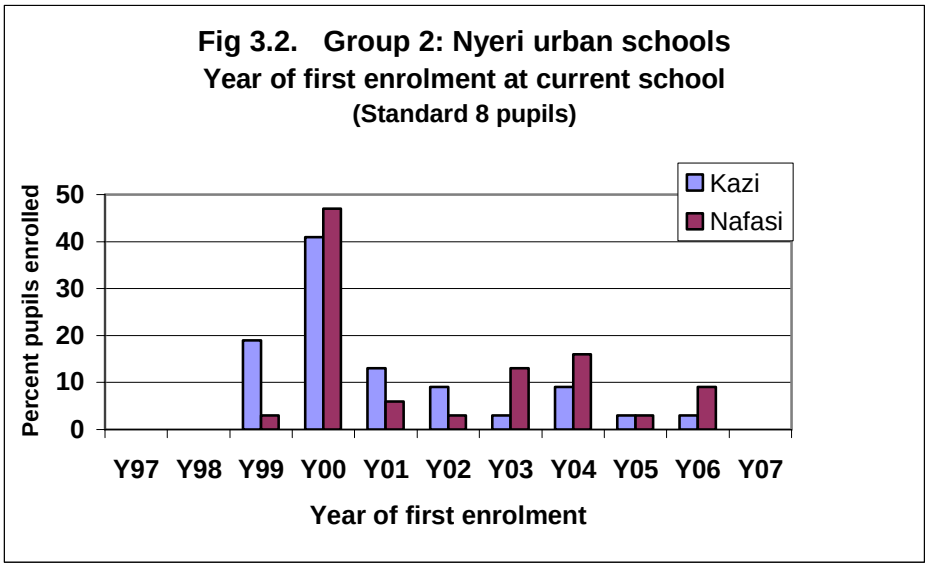
FPE year, far outnumber those in any other year, including the year 2000, when most of these who have never changed schools first enrolled. Few pupils have entered either school since 2003.

3.2.2 Group 2: Nyeri urban schools

Although the buildings and physical facilities provided at the two Nyeri urban schools (Kazi, Nafasi) are much inferior those available at the Group 1 Nairobi schools just discussed, they nevertheless recruit their students from families of much higher socioeconomic and educational status. Guardians with white-collar occupations were almost absent at the two Group 1 schools, but are prominent at both Kazi and Nafasi (53%, 37%). Similarly education levels are high: the great majority of guardians were educated to the secondary level or beyond (88%, 64%). Land ownership is common (85%, 50%), although at Nafasi perhaps not as common as might be expected at a school located in a town which retains close ties with its rural hinterland. A substantial minority of landowners employ labourers to work on their land.

A notable feature of the Standard 8 pupils at these Group 2 schools is the small size of the families they come from (means 2.30, 2.86). The demographic transition is still in its early stages in Kenya as a whole, but it is clearly well under way among the families sending their children to these schools. A further feature is their relative youth (mean ages 13.65 years, 13.81 years). They are on average about one year younger than their counterparts at the Group 1 schools. A likely contributing factor is that schooling histories are more stable: median durations of stay at the current school (7.70 years, 7.50 years) are more than two years higher than they are at Group A schools. About half the pupils (57%, 43%) have never changed school since enrolling in Standard 1, while very few (6%, 3%) entered the school in 2003, the FPE year. Repetition rates are also a little lower (43%, 28%).

The years in which current Standard 8 pupils entered these two Nyeri urban schools are plotted in Figure 3.2. Again the curves are strikingly similar; but contrast sharply with the curves for the Group 1 schools shown in Figure 3.1. Most pupils enrolled in these schools in Standard 1; mainly in 2000 or (in the case of Kazi) 1999. Only a few were recruited in 2003 or in subsequent years.



3.2.3 Group 3: Nyeri rural schools

As we would expect, the profiles of the Standard 8 pupils attending these two rural schools differ radically from those of the urban pupils in Groups 1 and 2. The guardians of most pupils at Mugunda and Baraza schools earn their living through working on the land, either as farmers (60%, 31%) or as farm labourers (15%, 23%). White collar workers are virtually absent (4%, 0%) while non-agricultural manual workers are relatively few (13%, 27%). Guardians at Mugunda and Baraza are less well-educated than those in any other group: only a minority (36%, 18%) continued their schooling past the primary level.

Schooling histories are much more stable at these two rural schools than at any of the urban schools we visited: the great majority of the current Standard 8 pupils (85%, 68%) have received all their education at the school they are now attending. No pupil at either school entered the cohort in 2003, the FPE year.

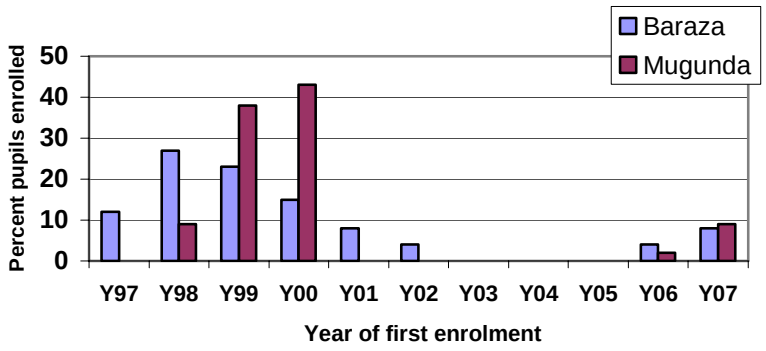
But despite these consistencies, the profiles of the two Nyeri rural schools diverge at two points. At Baraza, repetition is far commoner than at any other school we visited (88% have repeated at least once since they started Standard 1), whereas at Mugunda repetition is less frequent (only 49% have repeated). Further analysis (not shown in the table) indicates that 23% of the Baraza pupils have repeated as many as three times, and another 19% have repeated twice. At Mugunda, by contrast, no pupil has repeated three times, and only 9% twice. In consequence, Baraza pupils are on average nearly one year older than their Mugunda counterparts (15.23 years, 14.32 years), and older by a considerable margin than pupils in any of the other schools visited.

It seems that the principal and teachers at Baraza have continued the practice, common a generation ago but now officially discouraged, of requiring pupils to repeat a grade if they failed the end-of-year examination. In a study of seven rural primary schools in a single Nyeri location conducted about 35 years ago, it was found that 63% of 275

Standard 7 pupils had repeated at least one grade since starting Standard 1 (Somerset 1974) [12]. The approach provided a rough-and-ready means of ensuring that weaker pupils did not fall too far behind their classmates; especially important in schools which lacked the means to cope with individual learning differences, either because of large class sizes or because teachers lacked the necessary professional skills to provide remedial help. But it was of course inefficient: the average time taken by a cohort of Standard 1 entrants to complete the primary schooling cycle was often considerably longer than the officially-stipulated period.

The impact of these recruitment and repetition patterns at the two Nyeri rural schools can be seen in Figure 3.3, which plots the years in which the current Standard 8 pupils first enrolled. The contrasts, especially with the Nairobi low-income schools in Group 1, are striking. The educational histories of pupils at both Group 3 schools are stable, and – at Baraza in particular – often extended well beyond the official eight years. The commonest year of recruitment to Baraza for the 2007 Standard 8 class was 1998: these pupils were in their tenth year of attendance when we met them. Together with those recruited in 1997, they made up 40% of the Standard 8 class in 2007. At both schools, no pupils were enrolled in 2003, the FPE year, and more recent recruitment into the upper standards has been rare. These schools serve catchments which are defined by geographic rather than socioeconomic criteria, so that transfers – both inward and outward – are relatively uncommon.

Fig. 3.3 Group 3: Nyeri rural schools
Year of first enrolment at current school
(Standard 8 pupils)



[12] Table 7.4, page 176. At the time the primary school cycle ran for seven years rather than the current eight. One of the sample schools was Mugunda.

3.2.4 Group 4: The Nairobi ex-high cost school (Kisasa)

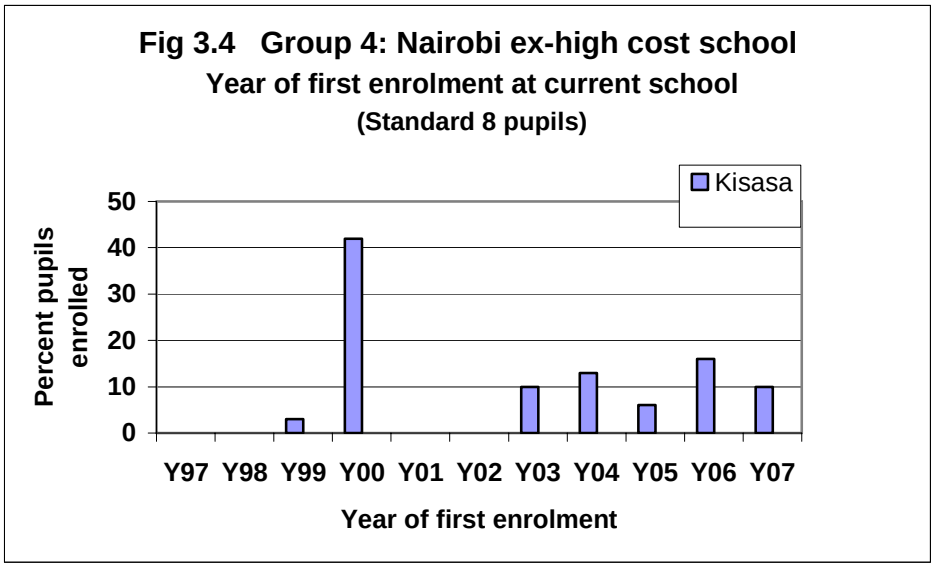
This group consists of one school only: Kisasa. As we have already noted, Kisasa was one of six Nairobi schools restricted to Europeans only during the colonial period. Shortly before Independence these schools were re-designated as 'high-cost' schools; publicly-funded, but charging higher fees than regular public schools. In effect, the old racial barrier to access was replaced by a financial one. Kisasa retained its high-cost status until 2003, when formal fees and charges in all public schools were abolished.

Consistent with the school's former status, most Standard 8 pupils at Kisasa come from relatively privileged home backgrounds. The majority (55%) of guardians are white-collar workers, of whom about one-third are graduate professionals. Virtually all of them (93%) have post-primary education; more than half attended university. Although none of the guardians are full-time farmers, agricultural land ownership is more frequent (83%) than it is in either of the Nyeri rural schools. About two-thirds (70%) of the landowners employ labourers to work the land: much the highest proportion in the public schools we visited.

Repetition is much less frequent (15%) at Kisasa than at any other public school. No pupil repeated more than once, and in more than half the cases, repetition accompanied transfer from another school. We were told that teachers run remedial groups for slow learners, to obviate the need for repetition whenever possible.

Kisasa Standard 8 pupils are on average about one year younger (13.87 years) than comparable pupils at the two Nairobi low-income schools, and they come from families which are considerably smaller (mean family size, 2.53). However they do not differ significantly on either variable from pupils at the two Nyeri urban schools.

The years in which the current (2007) Standard 8 class entered Kisasa are plotted in Figure. 3.4. The pupils, it will be seen, fall into two distinct groups of nearly equal size. About half have received a stable primary education: they were recruited into Standard 1in 2000 (or in one case, 1999), and have continued at Kisasa ever since. The other half transferred to Kisasa in small numbers each year over a five-year period, starting in 2003 and continuing through to 2007. We learned that with the abolition of fees in 2003, Kisasa began losing pupils to the private schools, and in consequence actively recruited new entrants to all standards. Even so, total enrolment dropped nearly 10% between 2002 and 2007 (from 1311 to 1184).

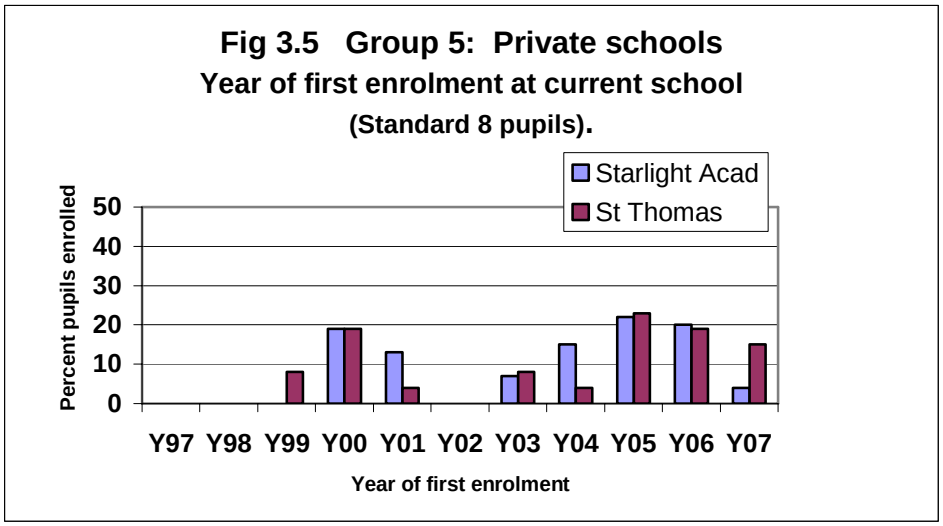


3.2.5 Group 5: Private schools

Family privilege is even more typical of the pupils attending the two private schools included in our case-study (Starlight Academy, St Thomas) than it is of pupils at the ex-high cost school (Kisasa) just discussed. Well over half the guardians (59%, 59%) are employed in white-collar occupations, including substantial proportions in the graduate professions. Guardians who are self-employed (35%, 22%) are, without exception, proprietors of shops or other enterprises rather than petty traders. Post-primary education is virtually universal (96%, 100%), while nearly half (42%, 48%) attended university.

Land ownership shows an interesting divergence between the two Group 5 schools. At St Thomas, in Nyeri town, ties to the rural areas remain strong: nearly all guardians (86%) are agricultural land owners, although none are full-time farmers and most (78%) employ labourers. But at Starlight Academy, located, it will be remembered, in a rapidly-expanding middle-income dormitory area just outside Nairobi, these traditional ties appear to be weakening. Only a little over half (56%) the guardians own agricultural land, whereas a substantial minority (37%) own building plots. Growing numbers, it seems, are becoming settled town-dwellers: they look towards urban property, rather than rural land, as sources of income and security.

Standard 8 pupils at these two private schools are on average younger (13.48 years, 13.77 years) than those at any of the public schools visited except one. Repetition rates are low, especially at Starlight Academy (11%, 43%). Schooling histories, however, are unstable, as Figure 3.5 makes clear.



Only a small minority of the current final-year pupils (17%, 27%) entered Standard 1 in the year 2000 or in 1999, and thus received all their primary education at the school they are now attending; whereas about half (46%, 57%) were recruited during the past three years, as transferees from other schools. The contrast with the stable patterns at the two Nyeri rural schools (Group 3) could hardly be sharper.

3.3 Overview and conclusions

As the previous section has shown, the profiles of the five school-groups we identified among the nine schools visited differ substantially. They recruit pupils from contrasted family backgrounds, and there are marked differences in the pupils' schooling histories.

The Standard 8 pupils attending Nairobi low-income schools (Group 1: Tangazo, Majani) come mainly from less-privileged backgrounds. Their guardians work predominantly in manual occupations, mainly semi-skilled or unskilled, although a considerable proportion (around half) received post-primary education. Despite the fact that they live in an urban environment, surprising numbers (again around half) own agricultural land. The pupils are of above-average age, and they come from relatively large families. Fairly high proportions have repeated at least once since their first enrolment.

The buildings and physical facilities provided at the Nyeri urban schools (Group 2: Kazi, Nafasi) are less impressive than those available at the Group 1 schools, but nevertheless the pupils' home backgrounds are typically more privileged. A high proportion of guardians work in white collar jobs, and the majority were educated past the primary level. Most are landowners, although family members rather than hired labourers usually work the land. Pupils are younger than those in Group 1 schools, and they come from families which are considerably smaller.

The guardians of pupils at the Nyeri rural schools (Group 3: Mugunda, Baraza) are, as we would expect, mainly farmers or farm labourers, and they are less well-educated than

guardians in any other group. Families are of medium size, but repetition rates are high; in consequence, pupils tend to be older than those in other groups.

Levels of privilege are highest among pupils attending the ex-high cost Nairobi school (Group 4: Kisasa), and more particularly the two private schools (Group 5: Starlight Academy, St Thomas). Among their guardians white-collar occupations predominate, and post-primary education is practically universal. Most guardians are landowners, and in contrast to those in all other groups, generally employ labourers to work the land, rather than depend on family members. Pupils are relatively young, and come from relatively small families.

The differences just outlined are, except for a few details, more or less those that might have been anticipated from even a casual acquaintance with the history and current structure of primary education provision in Kenya. Less expected, however, were the massive differences in schooling stability. At the two Nyeri rural schools, pupil recruitment after Standard 1 is uncommon, and repetition frequently extends the duration of attendance beyond the official eight-year period. In sharp contrast, patterns at the more elite schools are highly unstable. At the two private schools visited, a typical Standard 8 pupil has been on the register for less than four years.

The radical changes in the lives of Kenyans brought about by their migration from the rural areas to the towns and cities in search of new and better-rewarded opportunities are clearly paralleled by changes in the schooling experiences of their children. In rural areas, most primary schools have fairly well-defined geographic catchment areas, so there is relatively little competition among them for recruits.[13] Most pupils enter, more or less as a matter of course, the school located closest to their homes. In Nyeri District at least, dropout is now infrequent, although if the two rural schools we visited are typical, grade repetition is still widely practiced. Thus a high proportion of Nyeri rural pupils are likely to have their entire primary-education experience at a single school, for a period which repetition may extend beyond the stipulated eight years.

In the towns and cities, by contrast, primary schools are much closer together, so several are likely to be accessible to most pupils, even those who walk to school rather than use public transport. The range of available choice is widened still further by schools in the burgeoning private sector. In Nairobi, as we have noted, private schools entering candidates for the KCPE examination already (by 2006) outnumbered public schools by 204 to 192; while even in the predominantly-rural Nyeri District, private schools made up more than 20% of all KCPE schools (102 private schools; 373 public schools).

In these changed circumstances, it is not surprising that a finely-graded school-quality hierarchy has emerged, defined mainly by the school's position in the KCPE league tables, and hence by its capacity to confer better life chances on its graduates. Competition for places at high-ranking schools is intense, especially among parents whose own education has provided access to well-rewarded opportunities and enhanced

[13] Although this may be changing with the incursion of private schools into rural areas. More data are needed.

life-quality. Many such parents are prepared to move their children from school to school, if it appears the transfer might boost their examination scores, and hence their life chances.

In the private sector this competition is managed mainly through fees. Systematic data are not available, but informal evidence strongly suggests a close relationship between fee levels and KCPE standing. Private primary schools face a difficult choice in deciding whether or not to accept new entrants into the upper standards. On the one hand, late recruits may well have academic weaknesses, which might in turn jeopardize the school's KCPE ranking. But on the other hand private schools depend mainly – or in many cases entirely – on fees for their income flow. It seems that at the two private schools we visited, income flow is a more important consideration than league-table ranking. However this may not be the case at all private schools; more evidence is needed.

During the cost-sharing period of the 1990s, the public schools also levied charges ('parental contributions') and again informal evidence suggests that these varied with the school's academic standing. However since the inception of the Free Primary Education programme in 2003, school fees, under whatever name, have been abolished. Hence the most sought-after public schools have had to find other ways to regulate intakes. The following chapter includes a discussion of the approaches adopted at one such school: the highest-ranking public school among the seven we visited.

Chapter 4 The Experience of Home Life, Schooling and FPE: Pupil Perceptions at the Nine Case-Study Schools

So far in this report we have considered two of the three main sets of information concerning the implementation of FPE gathered during our school visits. We started, in Chapter 2, with an analysis of the simplest data: straightforward counts of the numbers of pupils enrolled at each grade level in each school, during the years running up to FPE in 2003 and the years subsequent to it. We found that while FPE had led to a massive rise in pupil numbers at two of our sample schools, it produced virtually no enrolment effects at any of the others. In Chapter 3 we moved closer to gain a more detailed understanding. Using the family background and personal data provided by samples of Standard 8 pupils, we saw that the schools fell into five groups, serving quite distinct socioeconomic and geographic clienteles. Furthermore there were clear differences in enrolment patterns among the groups. At the two Nyeri rural schools the patterns were highly stable: most pupils had been enrolled at their present school since Standard 1. At the two private schools, by contrast, patterns were highly unstable: most pupils had transferred from one school to another at least once, and many had transferred several times.

In this chapter the perspective is closer still. Using autobiographies the pupils wrote for us, we explore qualitatively their perceptions of life at home and at school, including, in many cases, their experience of the Free Primary Education programme. The chapter also includes a detailed analysis of the previous schooling histories of pupils who entered their current school during the FPE year, based on their questionnaire responses.

We discuss each sample school in turn, following the grouping system set up in Chapter 3.

4.1 Group 1: Nairobi low-income schools (Tangazo and Majani

4.1.1 Tangazo school

At Tangazo School, it may be remembered from Chapter 2, the effects of the introduction of the Free Primary Education programme in 2003 were greater than at any of our other case-study schools. The Standard 1 class jumped from 89 in 2002 to 342 in 2003, a nearly four-fold rise. Earlier cohorts showed smaller but still substantial increases: the 2000 intake cohort, for instance, rose from 110 in 2002 (Standard 4) to 245 in 2003 (Standard 5), an increase of 123%. The total school roll almost doubled, from 943 in 2002 to 1766 in 2003.

As we saw in Chapter 3, FPE has had a continuing impact on enrolments at Tangazo. In our random sample of 30 Standard 8 pupils, no fewer than 15, or exactly half, joined the school in 2003, as FPE recruits. All of them entered Standard 4, and have progressed to Standard 8 without repeating[14]. They heavily outnumber the five pupils who were

[14] It is of course possible – even likely – that some FPE recruits have repeated a class since 2003. But these pupils will currently be in a lower class; hence we do not have data for them.

recruited to Standard 1 (four in 2000, one in 1999), and have received all their education at Tangazo.

It is noteworthy, however, that the great majority of these FPE recruits were transferees rather than dropouts: they had been at school in 2002, but transferred to Tangazo when FPE was implemented. Table 4.1 shows more details.

Table 4.1: Pre-FPE educational histories of current Standard 8 pupils who entered Tangazo school in 2003, the FPE year (random sample)

Dropouts re-entering school	2
Transferees:	
From public schools	3
From private schools	10
Total recruits in FPE year	15

Among the 15 FPE recruits, only two re-entered school after having previously dropped out. The other 13 pupils who entered Standard 4 all transferred directly from other schools, without a break in their education[15].

Both of the FPE re-entrants, one a boy the other a girl, write vivid accounts in their autobiographies of the experiences which led to their dropout. Box 4.1 gives excerpts.

In each of these young lives, parental death led to emotional disruption and economic deprivation, which in turn forced unwilling dropout. Both accounts display a striking resilience: the writers have each come to some sort of accommodation – however partial – with their losses, and both have seized the opportunity the Free Primary Education programme opened up to them.

[15] In interpreting these results it is of course important to keep in mind that this group consists of FPE entrants who have *survived* to Standard 8. Among the group of FPE entrants who have left school since 2003 the proportion of previous dropouts is likely to have been higher.

Box 4.1
Dropping out from school, and re-entry through FPE

(a) Girl, aged 15

My father die in 2002 when I was about 11 year up to now I don't have anyone (I can) call father. He die from a very dangerous disease and my mother live alone. When I saw my mother struggle to get food I was unhappy. I was tempted to leave school and get married.... and feed our children.... (But) I refuse because I remember my grandmother told me if you marry when you are young you will not live proper.... I wasted almost two years (not going) to school.... When we reach 2003 I hear that education is free so I decided to come to school and get knowledge. At school I came to standard four and... I am going well.... Now I prepare myself for KCPE and join secondary if I pass because next year secondary school will be free no charge.... If I continue with my education I would like to be nurse.... and help mother (so she) don't struggle a lot.

(b) Boy, aged 16

When my mother was still alive she use to tell me that my father died in a road accident. I did not have a chance to enjoy the father's love…. because he died when I was not yet born.... I consider my mother as my dad....

I am 16 now. Since my mother died when I was at the age of six my life has been a living hell for me. I moved to the city with my brother. My life there was not peaceful…. Every time I did a mistake I was punished severely (by my brother's wife). I was like a drum to her, any time she was frustrated she would finish her anger by beating me….

They decided to take me to our rural home. I join class three in a school which was about three kilometers away. The person whom I was left with would always wake me early in the morning to go to the shamba before I go to school…. There was a portion in the tobacco farm…. I would always work there twice a day.

Concerning my education I was forced to drop because I did not have money to pay for school fees. I moved to where my mother's sister was staying. Her son promise to cater for my education but after two months he withdrew his support. This forced me to drop out (again). I started to burn charcoal to cater for my personal needs. I did this for one year, (then)…. I join another school for another two years but I was forced to drop out because of money.

It was in 2001 when my older sister came to my rescue. She took me back to my brother's house (in Nairobi). Since it was an election year the opposition promise to bring free primary education. I went to class four in Tangazo primary (in 2003). I was the biggest among (the)…. pupils, some of them abuse me because of my body. I did not care because I knew that education is the most important thing in my life. I put effort, until now I am in class eight.

My greatest goal is to be a political. If I achieve this my target will be to make Kenya an economic power in Africa and in the world as a whole.

The other 13 pupils who entered Standard 4 at Tangazo in the FPE year all transferred directly from other schools, without a break in their education. Ten of these transferees came from private schools; only three were from other public schools[16]. But with just one exception, all the private-school transferees had attended low-cost non-formal schools: 'private schools for the poor' as they have been called (Tooley, 2003, 2005). These schools, which are generally run by faith-based or other non-government organizations, follow the regular school curriculum but are registered with the Ministry of Gender and Social Services rather than the Ministry of Education (Sivasubramaniam, 2007).

These 'private schools for the poor' are quite distinct from elite, high-cost private schools such as the two we visited: Starlight Academy in Nairobi and St Thomas in Nyeri. Our respondents who had transferred to Tangazo in the FPE year listed seven such schools they had previously attended. It is likely they were enrolled at these schools because, before FPE, the fees they charged were lower than the 'parental contributions' levied by Tangazo and other public schools. Only two of the schools appear in the Nairobi City KCPE league tables for 2006, suggesting that for the most part, the schools focus on the lower grades and may not offer the full eight-year primary course[17].

Tangazo school sits astride the boundary between two strongly contrasted housing areas: the huge informal Kibera slum settlement to the south; formal middle-income estates to the north. However Tangazo attracts few recruits from the formal estates. In our sample of 30 Standard 8 pupils, as many as 26 (87%) gave Kibera as their home location.

But although Tangazo is clearly a school for the children of the slums, not all the guardians who support them lack education or skills. If the pupils' questionnaire responses are reliable, about half the guardians continued their education past primary level – a few even past secondary level. Only one guardian has white-collar employment, but twelve are skilled or semi-skilled manual workers – carpenters, tailors, plumbers, drivers and the like.

The Kibera environment. In their autobiographies, pupils show varied responses to the Kibera environment. Dirt, poor sanitation, pollution, lack of security and family disruption are common negative themes:

> I live in Kibera slum where life is not good . . . because it is very dirty and we breathe bad oxygen. . . (Sometimes) thieves come there and start killing people. When I grow up I will do my best not to live there.
>
> Boy, 15

[16] Of whom two moved from public schools in rural areas.

[17] Both these schools scored a little higher than Tangazo in the 2006 KCPE, but were relatively weak performers compared with other private schools: one was in the bottom quartile, the other in the third quartile.

> Where we live is not good because. . .people kill other without reason…. Another thing is…. there are people who live with orphan children, but instead of treating them the way they do their (own), they treat them badly. Which has made some children to run away and settle in street.
>
> Girl, 14

Alienation is not the only response, however. One Tangazo pupil asserts the positive features of Kibera life: the difficulties are a challenge, spurring him to the effort which will enable him to escape:

> Living in slums to me is not a new thing, because there is where I was born . . . .but life is not so easy for those who live a lazy life because there nothing comes easy, we buy everything we want to use. My father is a tailor . . . .(he) is a busy man trying to feed seven children and two wives and renting the house. . . . . I am used to waking very early at five doing my revision for KCPE so that I can have a bright future.
>
> Boy, 15

Another pupil expresses deeply mixed feelings. She starts her account with an exasperated rejection of some negative aspects of Kibera:

> I like everything except the environment we live in. Though we learn science at school it gets so hard to talk to people about maintenance of the environment and hygiene also. The biggest part is dirt, dirt is all over the place and we barely have places we can call Tangazolets. The only method my neighbours use is the flying Tangazolets…. I am glad we have extraordinary Tangazolets at school.

She then writes at length about other matters, but finally returns to the Kibera theme in different mood:

> **A Poem for Kibera**
>
> Full of energetic, hardworking young men and women
> Some say you are full of thiefs, dirty and unhealthy people
> But whatever they say I know we can change you.
> I know you can be a better place
> Even though they say you are not worthy you will always be in my heart
>
> A place I grew in, a place I met my good and faithful friends
> The memories I captured as a child
> Will never erase from my mind
> Even though they say you are not worthy you will always be in my heart
>
> Girl, 14

Family life. For some pupils a warm family life, with support from two parents, provides protection from the harshness of Kibera:

> I live in Kibera. In our family we are four girls and three boys. . . We are poor but not very poor (so that) we can not eat, drink and wear our clothes. We can afford that. . . . Our parents are working very hard so that we can get something to eat, even as we are working hard in our schools so that we can lift them up. Something which makes

> me very happy in our family is that our parents love us all. You know when your parents (do not) love you, you can be thrown out of the house
>
> Girl, 11 (St 5 pupil)

However parental loss is a common experience.[18] Several pupils write about the material and emotional stress it has led to:

> My father is not working but just searching for work…. Sometimes we don't eat and just sleep…. When I miss to eat at night I come to school and wait for porridge in the morning…. When I come to school when I am hungry I can not hear what the teacher is teaching…. I have only one parent…. When I remember my mother I feel sad and just start crying…. When she was alive I would have not missed to take breakfast
>
> Girl, 15

Another pupil who has lost both parents lives with step-parents with children of their own. Although his material needs are met, he feels he does not receive fair treatment:

> Life to me has been very difficult since the death of my parents…. long ago when I was still a kid…. I was taken by my uncle to come and live here in Nairobi. My three sisters were taken by…. (other) relatives. I was brought here to Tangazo school…. There are some problems I am experiencing at home. First of all every household task is left for me. I wash dishes, clothes and fetch water every day. They buy things like clothes and shoes for their two children (but not for) me. (But) there is something from them I like very much. When it comes to education they do not hesitate in buying me uniforms and paying for me…. whenever we are asked
>
> Boy, 15

Another writer who has also lost both parents has been more fortunate. She has stable parental surrogates without children of their own, and tells of the support she and her sisters receive from them:

> I live in a family of five members I have two sisters but no brother. I am the last born…. Since (we) don't have parents we live with our uncle (and aunt) but he took us as his own children because he didn't have any child. He is the one who provide us with our basic needs. He took me to school when I was four years old…. I'm working hard to go to (secondary) school as my sister who is in form three. My elder sister is now in university where she is training to be a nurse.
>
> Girl, 14

Even when both parents are present, the stresses of poverty can lead to alienation:

> I am 14 years old I live in (Kibera)…. with my family, my mother, father, brother and sister. We live there for many years but I don't like the way we live. Sometimes I want to leave that place but…. I remember a home is a home we must respect the way we live and be proud of our home. Sometimes it makes me feel bad and selfish. But I don't have anything I can do for (my parents)…. my learning is the only thing that can make me get away from that place…. Sometimes I wonder why I was born to that family…. I feel like I come from a tree.
>
> Girl, 14

[18] Although none of our writers mention it, HIV/Aids has almost certainly been a major contributor.

School life. Respondents have much to say about their experience of school, and almost without exception, their perceptions are positive.

The cleanliness of the school environment – especially the Tangazo toilets - is impressive:

> In our school we have many developments…. we use to have two toilets and two small urinals for boys …. now there are two big urinals…. and four toilets
>
> Boy, 11 (St 5 pupil)

> I love my school because we have trees and good toilets
>
> Girl, 11 (St 5 pupil)

> I have joined a club called adopt a tree. We have planted trees and we also clean our environment every morning.
>
> Girl, 16

As is the spaciousness:

> In our school there is so big field for pupils to play games. Other schools come to our school to play games
>
> Boy, 11 (St 5 pupil)

For some the school feeding programme is clearly a lifeline:

> The food and porridge we are getting every morning makes me happy especially (because my uncle) is not able. The *githeri* is rich in proteins and porridge is rich in carbohydrates which makes us healthy and strong
>
> Boy, 15

> My life at school is well and good, I thank God for the feeding programme in our school which is helping many of us with lunch
>
> Boy, 14

There are plaudits for the principal and teaching staff:

> Since Mr…. came to our school as headmaster he is the one who has introduced world food programme. He has also made our school to be painted.
>
> Girl, 14

> Tangazo primary is a very good school because teachers are well organized. (They) attend class every day. They tell us that when we come across a difficult question we can ask any teacher. Last but not least our head teacher…. has made our school to change in performance and also cleanliness.
>
> Girl, 16

> I came to Tangazo when I was in class 6. I have seen the urban (school) is better than the school in the rural areas. When I was learning in rural there were times when teachers refused to come to school…. we were made to stay at home for about two or three weeks which was not good at all
>
> Girl, 14

A pupil who came to Tangazo in Standard 4 during the FPE year, having previously attended three other schools, all private, is especially effusive:

> The school that I am gaining my knowledge in is.... (better) than any other school that I have learned from. It has the best teachers that pupils could wish to have.
>
> Boy, 16

However there is one dissident voice. She is one of the minority of pupils who started at Tangazo in Standard 1, before the Free Primary Education programme, and is not impressed by the changes that FPE has brought about:

> The thing I don't like in school is this free primary education, the way the children are misbehaving and disobedient…. I would be happy if the public school parents can be paying fees because when I was in standard three our school was performing very well…. in KCPE because those days we were taught well because the school was not free but nowadays, our school is decreasing instead of increasing
>
> Girl, 14

Despite the school's relatively homogeneous catchment, there are clearly distinctions between the poor and the not-quite-so-poor at Tangazo. Occasions when contributions are solicited for extracurricular activities highlight these distinctions, and can be stressful both for pupils who cannot pay:

> One day we were told to bring 100 shilling for computer…. I went and told my father but he refused and told me that he hasn't any money. Up till now I have not paid.
>
> Girl, 14

and for those who can:

> Sometimes we are asked to bring money for trip and many children are not able to pay, so they don't go on those trips and that stress many children and makes us feel sad
>
> Girl, 15

4.1.2 Majani School

We saw in Chapter 2 that among our nine case-study schools, the response to the 2003 Free Primary Education initiative at Majani school was second only to that at Tangazo. The intake to Standard 1 more than doubled, while earlier cohorts were all augmented substantially. The total school enrolment rose nearly 75% between 2002 and 2003.

Our analysis in Chapter 3 showed very similar final-year enrolment patterns at Majani to those at Tangazo[19]. In the final-year class of 2007, as many 33% were FPE recruits: they entered Majani in 2003, all of them into Standard 4. By comparison only 12 pupils entered in the year 2000 into Standard 1. FPE has clearly had a continuing impact on

[19] The Standard 8 class present at Majani on the day of our visit amounted to only 52 pupils, so we decided to administer the questionnaire to the full group, rather than to a random sample.

enrolments at Majani, as it has at Tangazo. Many pupils in the current final-year class at both schools owe their presence to the FPE programme.

But just as at Tangazo, the great majority of the FPE recruits were transferees from other schools, rather than re-entering dropouts. Table 4.2 sets out the details.

Table 4.2: Pre-FPE educational histories of current Standard 8 pupils who entered Majani in 2003, the FPE year

Dropouts re-entering school	1
Transferees:	
From public schools	4
From private schools	13
Total recruits in FPE year	18

The single dropout who re-entered school following FPE wrote briefly about the experience in his autobiography:

> When I was in class three my parents lose their jobs and they were not able to pay for my school fees…. I stayed outside school for one year. In 2003 when we got free education my parents did not lose any second to take me to school…. I have learned in this school for four years…. When I got back in school I started to aim…. to be an engineer
>
> Boy, 15

Among the 17 FPE-year recruits who transferred directly to Majani, without a break in their education, only four came from public schools – all of them schools located in rural areas. The other 13 came from a wide range of private schools, the majority located in Nairobi city. But as at Tangazo, these were not (with one exception) elite, high-cost schools; rather, they were for the most part modest, semi-formal schools, catering mainly for children from lower-income families.

It is noteworthy that only four of these 13 pupils had experienced stable, unbroken education at a single private school in their pre-FPE years, before transferring to Majani in Standard 4. Eight pupils had attended two schools, while one had been enrolled in three - a different school for each standard. Although we do not have direct evidence, it seems likely that difficulties in paying fees contributed to this instability:

> I thank God because now there is free education in our country we can learn without being chased away because of school fees (as happened) when we were in private school.
>
> Girl, 16

Our 13 informants had attended a total of 18 different private schools before moving to Majani at FPE. Only four of these schools appear on the Nairobi KCPE merit-order list for 2006. They were not high-achieving schools: only one ranked significantly higher than Majani in the 2006 merit-order lists, while two other schools ranked considerably *lower*.

Several of the transferring pupils wrote about their move to Majani in their autobiographies. None gave any hint that they felt they were entering a school of inferior quality; in fact, quite the reverse:

> When my mother (died) I came to Nairobi…. I joined a (private) school called…. I joined (Majani) when the free education started. The first day at this school I was afraid and I thought…. the pupils I found here were more clever than me. Luckily one of the teachers…. seemed to know my weakness and encouraged me so much…. Free education really made my life easy. This is because I had time to learn without being sent home for fees. I like my (principal) because she make sure we all have a chance to learn.
>
> Girl, 16

> The day I arrived in Nairobi my brother looked for me a school. I joined one called Upendo. I started there in class three and it was private…. (but) my brother couldn't pay 5,000 shillings…. I started free primary education in class four at Majani when I was eleven years old. I liked that school (better) than the one I was in before
>
> Girl, 15

Although private school fees were often a burden for low-income families, it may nevertheless have been less expensive - at least in the short term – to enrol a child at a low-cost private school than at many public schools in the years before FPE. With the introduction in the early 1990s of the education cost-sharing scheme as part of the structural adjustment process, public school management committees had been required to take responsibility for most non-salary costs - including buildings maintenance and the provision of textbooks and other equipment. To meet these costs, committees levied 'parental contributions', which varied from school to school according to local needs and circumstances.

At many public schools the main component of the parental contribution was the school entrance fee, a single per-family payment levied when the family enrolled its first pupil at the school. The Majani levy amounted to Kshs 20,000. Spread out over several years and more than one child, the levy would have been in most cases lower than the per-term fees charged at low-cost private schools; but as a single up-front payment it was clearly an insurmountable barrier for many low-income families.

As the principal of one of our case-study schools commented:

> *In the middle and upper-class (public) schools cost-sharing was successful. But in the poverty schools the impact was devastating.*

Although it is now more than four years since FPE was first implemented, not all the 'pre-FPE' pupils have as yet fully accepted the newcomers:

> When I join Majani in 1999…. free education was not there. My parents paid twenty thousand for my entrance…. Teachers were many at that time…. When they announced free education…. many people came and some of them they don't know

> discipline in school…. When the teachers tell them to behave (well) they behave badly.
>
> Boy, 16

> I was brought to this school in 1999 in the pre-unit…. At that time before free education started we were not as many as we are right now. Many pupils have bad behaviour from those days our school changed completely.
>
> Girl, 14

As we saw in Chapter 3, the socioeconomic profile of the families of Majani pupils is similar in many respects to the profile at Tangazo. At both schools about one-half the guardians continued their own education past primary level, but only a few (three at Majani, one at Tangazo) have white-collar employment. A little under one-third (31% at Majani; 30% at Tangazo) are skilled or semi-skilled manual workers. There is, however, one significant difference. As we have seen, Majani was initially established during the colonial period as a school for the servants of Europeans living in what was, at the time, a whites-only residential area. Despite the changes since Independence, this tradition continues: the sons and daughters of domestic servants still make up a substantial proportion (33%) of the Standard 8 student body at Majani, whereas they are almost absent (3%) at Tangazo.

Less than half the Standard 8 pupils at Majani who completed our questionnaire live in the prosperous western suburbs which surround the school – most of them, presumably, in the servants' quarters which nearly always accompany elite housing in Nairobi. The majority commute, often considerable distances, from low-income housing estates in other parts of the city. Transport costs have risen sharply in recent years, especially since the implementation of safety regulations restricting the number of passengers that *matatu* (light passenger vehicles) can carry[20]. In consequence, many pupils walk:

> Every morning I wake up at five to prepare myself for school. I come to school by foot because my uncle cannot afford…. the bus fare…. Sometimes I even come to school without taking breakfast
>
> Girl, 16

Rising *matatu* fares have, in the perception of the school principal and several of her staff members, contributed substantially to recent falling enrolments at Majani. After peaking at 692 in 2004, the total roll dropped to 585 (15%) in 2005 – the year when the traffic safety regulations were first implemented. Since then, more gentle declines have taken the roll down to 502 in 2007.

To counter sagging pupil numbers, the school principal follows an open-access policy:

> *We are a non-selective school. We accept each and every one that applies. No child is refused.*

[20] Because every passenger must occupy a seat, *matatu* charge school pupils the full adult fare. From Kangemi to Majani, this amounts to Kshs 20 for a single journey.

Unlike Tangazo, Majani does not qualify for a school feeding programme, apparently because of its location in a high-income suburb. But several pupils write of hunger and its effects:

> Every morning I do not take anything before I come to school. Sometimes when it is holidays I do not eat lunch.
>
> Girl, 15

> I live with my father (in Nairobi). My mother is in rural area with my two sisters. Sometimes I have found life so hard because my father doesn't have a job…. I am very stressed about this…. it has started interfering with my studies. Sometimes we sleep hungry and I come to school hungry. I have now started dropping in my learning…. I don't come for tuition because…. there is nowhere I would get money to pay for it
>
> Girl, 17

Two non-government organizations do provide free lunches, but only to about 35 pupils - just 7% of the total pupil body. Inevitably this leads to tension: many of the non-recipients are of course as much in need as the recipients.

Majani pupils write less frequently about their home environment than pupils at Tangazo. Overcrowding, rather than poor sanitation and lack of security, is the main concern:

> My family is made up of seven members…. My parents are both alive. We stay in a one-roomed house in Kangemi…. My desires are many. First…. I would like my family to live in a good house.
>
> Boy, 15

Similarly, accounts of family trauma are less common – although no less poignant:

> Unfortunately my mother does not live with us they divorced. But life continued and my father married another wife. It was so painful. I thought that one day my mother would come back and (we would) be a happy family again but it was all gone…. Life without a mother is not life
>
> Girl, 14

> I have stayed with my mother since she gave birth to me I have never lived with my father…. I am not so happy living with one parent…. I would like to live in more rooms than the one we live in now…. I want to see my mother having a happy smile on her face
>
> Girl, 15

Majani pupils often retain strong links to their rural roots: fully one-third (33%) of our Standard 8 informants received part of their primary education at one or more rural schools. Attitudes, however, are mixed. One girl rejects the rural life, using a Sheng term with derogatory connotations which has been current among Nairobi school pupils for at least 30 years. She was educated in Nairobi to Standard 3, moved to the family rural home for Standards 4 and 5, then returned to Nairobi for the final three standards:

> My parents passed away when I was young but I thank the Lord my aunt and my uncle are helping me and my family…. I dislike when my auntie tells me to go to *ushago* (rural home) because there's a lot of work (there) that I really don't like at all
>
> Girl, 14

By contrast a boy, who was educated in a rural town until his family moved to Nairobi three years ago, has had difficulty in adjusting to the ways of his urban classmates:

> My father qualified…. for a job in Nairobi…. and this forced the rest of the family and me to leave Kitale and come to Nairobi. Here at Nairobi, I faced many challenges, especially…. the language my colleagues spoke. This was Sheng. I really complained to my teacher and…. I came up with a solution. I realized that no examination came in Sheng. I did not engage in the language any more but instead I was studying and reading books. This led my fellow pupils to label me a bookworm. I did not care (although) they really disturbed me.
>
> Boy, 15

4.2 Group 2: Nyeri urban schools (Kazi and Nafasi)

We saw in Chapters 2 and 3 that in contrast to the two Nairobi low-income (Group 1) schools, the introduction of Free Primary Education in 2003 had only minimal impact at Kazi and Nafasi, the two Nyeri urban (Group 2) schools we visited. At both schools total enrolment increased only marginally in the FPE year (from 1045 in 2002 to 1072 in 2003 at Kazi; from 1294 to 1300 at Nafasi). As Figure 3.2 in Chapter 3 shows, there were no more recruits from the FPE year in the 2007 Standard 8 cohorts than from either the preceding year (2002) or the subsequent year (2004).

In this section we enquire further into pupil histories at the two schools, starting with Kazi.

4.2.1 Kazi School

As we saw in the previous chapter, schooling histories at Kazi and Nafasi are fairly stable – although not as stable as those at the two Nyeri rural schools. At Kazi, about 60% of our sample of the 2007 Standard 8 class entered the school as first-grade students, either in 2000 or in 1999. The remaining 40% entered in small numbers each year between 2001 and 2006, predominantly in the earlier years. Only two have been recruited in the past three years (none at all in 2007) and only one in 2003, the FPE year. All were transferees from other schools, rather than re-entering dropouts.

It is noteworthy, however, that in contrast to the patterns at the Nairobi low-income schools (Group 1), the transfer flow was predominantly from public rather than private schools. Ten transferees came from public schools; only three from private schools. Most transfers were over short distances: only one was from a school outside Nyeri District.

More important: *all the transferees, without exception, were from schools ranking lower than Kazi in the KCPE league table*. In most cases, the performance gap was wide. In the 2006 examination, Kazi candidates averaged 329 points; whereas the 10 public schools

from which pupils had transferred had means ranging from 200 to 280 points. The most typical (median) value was 227, so the performance gap was typically more than 100 points!

In the 2006 league-table listings, Kazi stood at rank no. 6 among 373 Nyeri public schools; a position which gave the school much local prestige, and was a source of pride to teachers and students alike. By contrast the public schools from which the transferees had come stood typically at around rank no. 180.

Even the private schools from which pupils transferred were less successful in KCPE than Kazi, although with these schools the performance differences were smaller.

In these circumstances, it is scarcely surprising the Kazi is a highly popular school, and attracts many applications from would-be entrants. The Principal commented:

> *Parents often try to bring their children here from other schools, but our policy is to accept them only if the father has come to the town on transfer. If a child is having problems (at the current school) we advise the parents to work with the teachers to try to solve them. Many of these schools have empty classrooms, but still pupils want to come here. If you poach a pupil from another school you are denying that school funds because of the capitation grant.*

Two of the transferees in the 2007 Standard 8 class write about their experience in their autobiographies. It is clear from both accounts how desirable Kazi school appeared to outsiders - and how difficult it was to surmount the barriers to recruitment!

> I was born in a village where people were…. not enlightened. I am the only child of my parent (mother)…. The schools in that area had inexperienced teachers. While I was in class three, my class teacher brought a radio to the class. That day we did nothing apart from listening to the radio…. I thought it would be a surprise to mum when I told her of the radio listening day. Instead…. she started boiling in anger. I wanted to ask her if I was the one (who had made) a mistake…. but I was timid as a rabbit. When night fell, I asked her…. She told me she would find me another school…. After two months she got a school.
> (At Kazi) I found (the pupils were) already enlightened. I wished I would be like them. I was forced to repeat the previous class….. I was a lonely newcomer and the only friend I got was a teacher named Mrs Murage…. She taught me how to unite with other people…. After two months I had many friends since I was an achiever.
>
> Boy, 15

> In 2001 I was in a different school. I wanted to join Kazi but the head teacher refused…. In 2004 my parents really tried their best, and…. that time he agreed
>
> Boy, 15

It seems evident that, without unusually persistent parents, neither of these pupils would have been accepted into Kazi!

Despite the school's recruitment policy, Kazi had nevertheless participated in the Free Primary Education programme in 2003. The Principal explained:

> *We accepted a group of 20 street-boys in the FPE year. They were educated in a separate class. But after about eighteen months they had all dropped out.*

Kazi regulates not only the transfer of pupils from other schools, but also the intake to Standard 1. The school runs a two-year preschool programme, graduation from which is a virtual pre-requisite for Standard 1 recruitment. The output from the pre-school programme numbers 150 pupils per year, exactly matching the Standard 1 intake.

The testimony of one of the current (2007) Standard 8 pupils suggests that even at the pre-school level, latecomers cannot always find places easily:

> I was born in a place known as Tanzania…. I went to a (nursery) school but in Tanzania nursery is just for leisure…. My father was transferred…. to Nairobi…. and my mother decided to shift…. to Kazi.
> My first good experience was that the headmaster allowed me to join Kazi DEB nursery class. I was the only person who was allowed to join…. I was always the top best boy in that class. When my first year finished I was five years old. I qualified to go to Class 1. But in Class 1 a girl started…. proving to be the best pupil in the three streams.
>
> Boy, 14

Pre-school education is often an extended process. This pupil, currently in Standard five, seems to have spent at least four years in a succession of pre-school programmes:

> My (first) school was Kilima nursery…. I was not able to write and read but the teacher taught me…. I stayed there one year and my mother took me to Shambani nursery. I stayed there two years and a half. I did an interview (for Kazi preprimary) and passed. I was in position ten…. I started preprimary…. The first exam…. I was in position fifteen.... we learned and we did another exam and I was position seven. I was promoted to the next class and that was standard one.
>
> Boy, 11

For another Standard five pupil, writing about his pre-school experience revives pleasant memories - albeit mainly about the rewards which followed successful performance:

> When I was very young I went to baby class…. When we did our exams I was always number one…. and I was given presents. Then I came to Kazi…. pre-primary. I was very happy…. I was very active in class and I always got a present at every exam. I loved the teacher because she was kind
>
> Boy, 10 (St 5 pupil)

Kazi, like all other public schools, charges no formal fees for the primary cycle of education. But this is not the case with the pre-school programme, which as we have seen is virtually compulsory if a Standard 1 place is to be assured. Parents pay 1,000 Kenya shillings per month (approximately $US 18) for each pre-school child; a substantial economic barrier which doubtless helps explain why, as we saw in Chapter 3, Kazi draws

most of its recruits from relatively privileged, white-collar backgrounds, despite its location in a deprived urban area.

A single-minded focus on academic success pervades a high proportion of the autobiographies written by Kazi pupils. Box 4.2 gives two examples.

Box 4.2
Striving for achievement at Kazi

My life has been so good with my mother and my elder brother. We live in my grandmother's home since my mother is not married. I love my mother and my brother very much and…. I do all what I can to please (them). My brother always helps me in my studies…. He always encourages me and tells me I should work hard so I can go to the best secondary school. I don't like letting him down so I do my level best…. I wake up at four o'clock to revise and to prepare to come to school. I leave home at quarter to six since I come to school by bus. If I arrive early, I start revising and take advantage that the school is quiet….

My teachers have helped so much in my studies and every day I make sure I have learned a new thing…. I love playing football but since I entered standard eight I have always avoided it since…. this is the year for hard work and I also remember that I will have two to three months for playing it when I finish my primary education….

Boy, 13

We are four siblings craving for education…. (Three years ago) my father got a very solemn disease. We cadged him to get medication but he refused. When it became worse he had to see a doctor. The next day we were taken aback to hear that he had passed away….

Years have swam by and now I am a candidate waiting anxiously for KCPE…. Teachers have always been lending us a hand and have never let us down. We are still pressing towards the goal. I attend classes eight hours a day…. Recently I have been leading in academic performance and I'm ready for the KCPE. Day and night I've been working hard and I'm hundred percent sure I'll pass with flying colours…. My mother has built me with words of courage and is always by my side.

Boy, 13

The KCPE examination casts a long shadow well back into the middle grades at Kazi, as these extracts from Standard five autobiographies illustrate:

> In the KCPE results our first candidate had four hundred and eighty four marks…. Our head teacher and all the other teachers were very happy about it.
> I am in standard five and I work very hard so that I may not be defeated. Last exam I was position one with four hundred and twenty marks so I pray God during KCPE I get higher marks so that I may please my school.
>
> Girl, 10

> I go to Kazi school. It is a good school (because) it is always the first in the province…. our class teacher is Mrs Njoroge…. I love her very much…. I am always the top in our class.

> I hope to be a surgeon…. because I am good in math and science…. My father tells me to study hard so that I may be a good person in future
>
> Boy, 10

One Standard 5 pupil already has his sights set on the Kenya Certificate of Secondary Education (KCSE), more than seven years away. B+ is the minimum grade needed for a university place:

> My future hope in KCPE is to get three hundred and ninety eight marks. In KCSE I would like to get B+ grade
>
> Boy, 10

However there are indications that the heavy emphasis on competition comes sometimes at the cost of damaged social relationships, both for those who succeed in the competition:

> I became number 1 in standard 1…. when I went to standard 2 I was still number 1…. the other pupils started trying to defeat me, but they were not able to…. they asked what else can we do…. When I heard I became very sad that they were going to defeat me, I put effort…. and they were not able to.
>
> Girl, 10 (St 5 pupil)

and for those who do not:

> In the class I face many problems…. (Sometimes) I don't understand the teacher and I fear to ask questions…. I dislike my classmates because when I fail my exam they laugh at me. I feel oppressed and like I would stop going on with my education.
>
> Girl, 13

Home life. Striving for achievement at school is a more important theme for most Kazi autobiography writers than life at home. Two pupils, however, write about the loss of a parent or guardian, and the stress it has caused:

> My studies were running smoothly until standard five…. It was on a Wednesday when I went home I heard sad news. I had lost my dear loved mum…. I was much stressed because I knew I would be called an orphan which I hated….
> I never stopped going on with my studies…. At home I feel proud because I have never been abandoned and I am still considered one of the family. But…. my life is difficult in school because sometimes (pupils) like harassing (me)….
> For now…. I pay attention to my education…. for next year I will join a high school which I have been hoping and dreaming of…. And reach the stage which my beloved mother reached….
> I am still comfortable in my life today…. In luck I was never taken to an orphanage.
>
> Boy, 14

> I am a girl aged fourteen years born to a single mother. We live hand to mouth…. but (my mother) always tries to provide us with the basic needs….
> Up to class three I was adopted by one of my grandmothers…. (but) unluckily she passed way and I had to go back to my own dear mum….
> Now…. I am concentrating on (my studies) in order to achieve my goals. I would like to acquire the career of neuro-surgeon. I am planning how to manage myself and

> how to stabilize my family too. I am not interested in anything apart from how to continue with my education and get my own salary.
>
> Girl, 14

While for two more fortunate pupils, the home is an unambiguous source of support, love and encouragement:

> Since my childhood I have known my parents to be very caring…. In class six I got very low grades which almost made me lose hope of reaching class eight. That day I went home in tears. My mother advised me and told me it was not the end of life, so in the next exam I…. passed with flying colours. From that day onwards I decided never to lose hope again and work hard to attain my goal and dreams.
>
> Girl, 13

> I (was) born in a well caring family. My parents took care of me till I was big enough to read and write. My mother always told me that I am the most important person in her life and this made me feel great and loved. I grew up knowing and loving both my parents.
> It was at this stage…. I went to my first class in primary school. My class teacher…. was kind and cared much for my performance. Mother loved her for the good and understandable language she talked but the sad thing is she later passed away.
>
> Girl, 13

4.2.2 Nafasi

As we saw in Chapter 3, pupil profiles at Nafasi school are broadly similar to those at Kazi, the other Nyeri urban school we visited. Nevertheless there are differences. Although pupils at both schools are relatively advantaged compared with those at the Group 1 schools in Nairobi, socioeconomic levels are rather lower at Nafasi. Fewer Nafasi guardians have white-collar jobs (37% compared with 53% at Kazi), fewer have post-primary education, and fewer own land.

Nafasi has been more receptive to new recruits than Kazi, especially in the upper standards. A little over half (56%) the pupils in our sample of the current (2007) Nafasi Standard 8 class transferred to the school from other schools, compared with only about 40% at Kazi. The majority of the Nafasi transferees were late recruits: they entered Standards 5, 6 or 7; whereas at Kazi nearly half entered Standard 2 or 3. As at Kazi, the transfer flow at Nafasi is predominantly from public schools: 14 transferees from the Standard 8 class came from public schools; just four from private schools.

Unlike Kazi, Nafasi has no attached pre-school unit, although a high proportion of Standard 1 recruits have attended one of the many pre-school programmes in Nyeri township. In consequence, access to Standard 1 is relatively unrestricted – though applicants outnumber the 150 available places by about two to one.

In comparison with other Nyeri public schools, Nafasi candidates perform well in the KCPE. The school achieved a mean score of 286 in the 2006 examination, which placed it in rank 19 among the 373 public schools, or rank 104 among all 475 schools, public and private. However in comparison with Kazi, where the mean score was 329, Nafasi is

considerably less successful. The 43-point difference meant almost certainly that a much higher proportion of Kazi candidates were accepted into the prestigious national and provincial secondary schools, which set substantially higher cut-off marks than the local secondary schools[21].

We saw in the previous section that all transferees to Kazi were, without exception, moving steeply up the 'KCPE gradient': from schools of relatively low KCPE standing to one of much higher standing. The pattern is repeated at Nafasi, but for public-school transferees only and on a less-steep gradient. In the case of the three private-school transferees for whom data are available, the gradient is reversed: 2006 KCPE means were higher at the originating school than at Nafasi. Presumably these pupils were moved for financial rather than academic reasons.

The autobiographies provide evidence of more relaxed attitudes to recruitment at Nafasi. Three writers in our Standard 8 sample came to Nafasi from St Margaret's, a church-supported institution which provides residential care for boys from disrupted families. All write at length about their early experiences, which include in two cases periods as street children in Nyeri town. Extended extracts from two of the autobiographies are given as Boxes 4.3 and 4.4.

The quality of both these pieces of writing – their eye for detail, their narrative flow, even their grammar and syntax - is immediately evident. Both boys had been allocated high index numbers for the forthcoming KCPE - 001 and 032 – indicating that their teachers were expecting them to perform well in the examination[22].

[21] Neither school was able to provide full statistics as to last year's graduates. However the principal of Nafasi told us that none had been accepted by a national secondary school, nor by the two most popular provincial schools. One Kazi girl was recruited by a national secondary school – the oldest and most prestigious girls' school in the Republic – while several gained places at provincial schools.

[22] Schools allocate index numbers to their KCPE candidates based on their performance in internal examinations. The index numbers are generally a fairly reliable predictor of final success – although of course some schools are more reliable than others.

Box 4.3
Life on the Nyeri streets

To begin with, everything was running smoothly. That is when my parents were living together. Then the worst thing happened; my parents divorced.

This all happened when I was a nursery kid. I was left in the hands of my mother. She tried her best to make sure that I went on with my studies. However, due to the very low income she got from the coffee farms, she was not able to cater for the family.

I ended up dropping out of (nursery) school…. The family was deteriorating. We started lacking even food, and sometimes we slept hungry with mother…. I made up my mind to search for food from the neighbouring trash cans. At last, I ended up finding myself in the streets.

In the Nyeri streets things were tough. In my first days there I received severe beatings from the older street boys who even introduced me to taking drugs like glue. They treated me very harshly. Even though things were hard there I could not go back to my mother because I knew that at home things were tougher.

After a few months in the streets I adapted to my new environment. (Then) something terrible happened again. It was the time the street boys were being arrested…. because of fighting the municipal council (workers) who had torn into pieces a paper-house…. built by the street boys.

I being one of them was arrested too. I was taken to court where I was sent to (a) juvenile (institution). However, after about half a year, I was released. I did not want to go back home, so I just made up my mind to go back to the streets.

After almost half a decade in the streets, a good Samaritan came to my help. A man…. took me to St Margaret's Junior Programme where my life changed completely. I met others who were also from the streets and from neighbouring poverty-stricken families.

I was taken to Nafasi Primary School. Life at school became very enjoyable. In my first year…. I was among the top ten. This gave me the mood to study harder…. This year, being my last year in primary school, I am hoping to pass with flying colours and get to one of the National Schools….

St Margarets is a programme for rehabilitating street children in Nyeri and also for supporting poor parents. We are provided with basic needs, among them education.

During school holidays we are given permission to go and visit our parents for those who have (them). This is the time I get a chance to live with my mother and two sisters. I help her with household chores when she is away at work…..

(But) I consider St Margaret's to be my home. That is because I have lived there since 1999 when that man came to help me…. My hope…. is to lead a good…. life after my studies and to at least deliver my mother from…. (her) second-class state. May God help me.

Boy, 18

Box 4.4
First experiences of institutional care

I started my education here in Nyeri at a nursery school…. When I finished…. we held a celebration which was meant as a goodbye party. We ate and bubbles of joy burst within me. After the celebration I went home with the hope of joining a primary school next year….

When time came for me to be taken to a primary school, my father who was the breadwinner of the family died. I was left under the care of my mother who was jobless. After a few weeks, my mother took me to live with my grandmother.

After one year at my grandmother's place, she took me to a place that I did not know. This was in the year 1999. Because my education had not evaporated, I could read a sign that was written St Margaret's Boys School. At first I thought that that was a primary school.

My grandmother left me somewhere seated on a form. After a long conversation with a man who looked kind to me, I and my grandmother went back home…. I asked my grandmother in my mother tongue what had happened. She replied that the following day I was to go to that place all alone.

On the following day I went to that place full of courage. On reaching the gate, I found the man there who had talked with my grandmother. He took me by the hand and led me to a place that was full of many tables and forms. He called it a dining hall. To me this word seemed to be Greek. I saw some boys carrying books. I was taken to a kitchen and given a piece of bread and a cup of tea. I was told to follow the boys who had carried books to where they had gone.

I found them seated in a classroom. I found a chair and sat on it. Just then, a woman came into the room and greeted us…. I heard the other boys calling her Mrs Njoroge. She called me and asked my name and I told her. She taught us up to lunch time. We ate lunch and then I went back home.

This happened for a year. (Then) in 2000 we were told to take our things from our homes and come to stay (at St Margaret's)…. We were bought a uniform, a pair of shoes and a bag each. We were taken to a primary school called Nafasi. I didn't know anybody except for those who were staying with me in St Margaret's….

When I was in class six something that made me very sad happened. My mother died. I and my brother were taken to our grandmother…. although even today I'm still staying at St Margaret's. I am a candidate for the KCPE exams (and hope) to join St Margaret's Secondary School.

Boy, 16 years

It is further noteworthy that both boys are well above the average age for Nafasi Standard 8 pupils; one by as much as four years. Neither was a transferee from another school: both started their education at Nafasi in Standard 1 in the year 2000, and have come straight through to Standard 8 without repeating. So both must have been very late starters – as indeed both make clear in their life histories. Given their initial handicap, they must have received sensitive and skilful teaching to enable them to catch up with their classmates so effectively.

Nafasi has developed a close working relationship with St Margaret's, and accepts several boys from the care home each year. We met a group of about 30 St Margaret's boys, enrolled in various grades from Standard 1 to Standard 8. All are taught as regular pupils in the regular classes; in contrast to the practice at Kazi, where as we have noted a separate class was set up for the street-children recruited in the FPE year. In terms of its average score, Nafasi is less successful in KCPE than Kazi. But in terms of value added, the two schools may well be at par.

The boys from St Margaret's seem to be well accepted by the other pupils – although for one, their prowess at football is a source of resentment:

> I have role models who I admire. I would like to be like David Beckham, the richest footballer in the world…. I have parents who encourage me in playing football….
> I am one of the best strikers in our school. For the last three years I have wanted to be in our school team but all that was only a dream….
> Boys from St Margaret's like playing football…. for our school. When we are about to play…. the St Margaret's boys are always in the first eleven but for the other boys who know football they are only made substitutes, and they never play
>
> Boy, 13

Nafasi pupils are of course well aware of the importance of the KCPE, and write about it frequently in their autobiographies. But for some at least life at school seems to be less pressured – perhaps more balanced - than it is for their counterparts at Kazi:

> I am thirteen years old, and I have only one brother. Our parents work very hard to educate us….
> This is a very disciplined school. It has good teachers who are very understanding…. (and) very cooperative parents….
> Every pupil from class four to class eight is required to arrive at seven o'clock…. After coming one goes for the morning preps for an hour. When the bell is rung we assemble at one place like termites on a shower day….
> My school usually performs very well in the exams. Both girls and boys work very hard to achieve their goals. Many pupils pass in the KCPE exams and go to very good schools. Many go to provincial secondary schools. Others go to national schools….
> Some of the pupils who have passed here are in the university. Some are doctors, lawyers, teachers, professors, engineers, writers etc. I am a candidate waiting to do my KCPE in November. But before we leave here we will have a party…. When I leave this school I will live to remember it. I am very proud of it.
>
> Girl, 13

The end of the year will bring the KCPE – but also a leaving party!

The boys from St Margaret's are not the only pupils at Nafasi from disrupted or marginalized backgrounds. Several who are still living at home write about economic stress:

> In our family we are eight in number, my mother, my two brothers and my five sisters. My father passed away two years ago after he fell sick. My mother was left to provide for us and she is the breadwinner of all of us in our home.
>
> Boy, 13

Despite FPE, attendance at primary school is not cost-free:

> These days I feel like I am not wanted because of the big debts I have in school because of not paying tuition money. I have almost two thousand shillings to pay (but) my mother is not working now
>
> Girl, 15

But most Nafasi pupils who write about home life seem relatively free of economic worries. They emphasize the support, love and encouragement they receive from parents and (occasionally) older siblings:

> When I have passed well in my exams and my parents shower me with gifts and blessings I feel so happy and accepted.
>
> Girl, 13

> Our parents care a lot about what is happening in our school. Whenever there is a fund raising our teachers, parents and ourselves join together to raise funds.
>
> Girl, 14

> My father is a mechanic in Nairobi and he really shows us a lot of love and care when he is around…. He is very much concerned with our learning because he puts a lot of effort to pay school fees…. I thank God for giving me such wonderful parents.
>
> Girl, 13

> I love being with my family…. because I feel good when we are all in the same place…. We are kind to each other we love each other and we respect each other.
>
> Boy, 13

> Thirteen years now have passed since I was born. My parents and older brothers and sisters have been taking care of me just as any normal child would want. In a family of nine, I've grown copying the good morals my brothers and sisters have had. They have influenced (me) a great deal…. Through this time of my life, where I go through a lot of changes and challenges, my family has been there for me, encouraging me in whatever I do. They have supported me and I appreciate it. To me they are all the good thing a man (*sic*) could want.
>
> Girl, 13

Built perhaps on her warm feelings for her family, the pupil just quoted also expresses wider social concerns. Her essay continues:

> One great thing that affects me most is to see others suffer. At times I put myself in suffering people's shoes and I just feel the pain…. It reminds me of our forefathers who died and suffered for our rights – the Africans' rights…. This was at the time Africa was being colonized…. but thanks to our freedom fighters the suffering is no more….
>
> The fact that tribes, countries and the continent are working hard to promote peace and development is enough to keep me happy.
>
> Girl, 13

Another pupil from a relatively-advantaged background is also developing a broader perspective; but one involving a more sombre assessment of the issues confronting Kenya.

> I am fifteen years old and I want to tell you about my feelings and how I respond to them…. I am a simple hearted person….
> The thing that makes me sad and angry is seeing the rich misuse the poor…. The rich have no respect for the poor yet they want to be respected and honoured. They misuse human rights. Kenya is full of discrimination.
> If you attend a meeting for example you shall note…. that only the rich are seen (as) people. Whenever he/she says something it is taken to be important. The poor…. make themselves poorer by not contributing any issue…. They are quiet listening and saying (that) everything said is good…. They usually feel shy not to be laughed at.
> Even in election(s)…. they are controlled like a vehicle. Wherever the driver wants it to go it goes.
> The thing that makes me feel happy is free education…. Now parents have no big burden of paying fees for their children. In twenty years to come if education continues to be free Kenya will have many learned people who are well equipped. Learned people cannot be cheated by the rich even though they are not as rich.
>
> Boy, 15

The sources from which social awareness develops are of course complex, but it is tempting to speculate that for this young writer, classroom experience shared with pupils from backgrounds much less advantaged than his own may well have contributed.

4.3 Group 3: Nyeri rural schools (Mugunda and Baraza)

The impact of the introduction of Free Primary Education in 2003 was even less apparent at our two Nyeri rural schools, Mugunda and Baraza, than at the two Nyeri urban schools just discussed. As we saw in the previous chapter, not a single pupil in the 2007 Standard 8 class at either Mungyange or Baraza had been recruited in the FPE year. At both schools, enrolments are highly stable: the great majority of the 2007 Standard 8 pupils entered their current school in Standard 1, and have never been educated elsewhere. Guardians are less well educated than those in any other school visited, and as we would expect, most of them work as farmers or farm labourers.

We now explore pupil experience at the two Nyeri rural schools in more detail, starting with Mugunda.

4.3.1 Mugunda

Only six of the 47 pupils (13%) in the 2007 Standard 8 class at Mugunda had transferred from another school: by a considerable margin the smallest proportion at any of the schools we visited. Three were from public schools, three from private schools. With the latter group, however, there are special circumstances. A small rural private academy opened within the Mugunda catchment area about five years ago. A number of Mugunda pupils moved there; but after a few years the academy closed and most moved back to Mugunda again – including the three private-school transferees we met in the Standard 8 class.

The three public-school transferees all entered Mugunda in Standard 7; one from a nearby rural school, the other two from schools outside the district.

Repetition is fairly common at Mugunda: 49% of the Standard 8 class had repeated once or twice during their schooling careers. It occurs in all classes, but is most frequent in Standard 1. There are two pre-schools nearby; both are semi-formal institutions run by parents. We learned from a Mugunda infant teacher that although most Standard 1 entrants are pre-school graduates, many come with an insufficient mastery of pre-reading and pre-numeracy skills, and thus do not always achieve the Standard 1 learning objectives.

Pre-school education is a much less intensive process at Mugunda than it is at a Nyeri urban school such as Kazi. Most pupils attend for one year only, and are not required to pass a test to enter Standard 1. It is also much less expensive: 700 Kenya shillings per term, compared with 1000 shillings per month at Kazi.

Writing their life stories was clearly a more taxing task for many Mugunda pupils than for their counterparts in the urban schools; partly because their prose-writing skills were generally less developed, but perhaps also because there was less to write about. Life in Mugunda has many advantages: soils are highly fertile; rainfall is plentiful; the cultivation of tea provides steady cash income; and land shortages are less acute than in most other parts of Kenya. However such an environment may provide relatively few challenges: rural lives are often less eventful than urban lives.

A number of essays were straightforward chronicles of entry to school and progression through the standards, with few unusual happenings to provide interest; except, in this case, a temporary move to a private school:

> I was born in Mugunda village. I am 13 years old. I am schooling in Mugunda primary school. I went to school in 2000. At that time I was happy to be with others. By this time I am in Standard 8. I have read for eight years….
> In year 2001 I went to Standard 2. Life in Standard 2 became very easy for me because I was achieving my goals. My parents became very happy with me.
> The following year I went to Standard 3. My parents realized I was working hard. They decided to take me to a better school. That school was called Charity Academy. I became very happy to be in the new school. Life became very enjoyable to me….
>
> Boy, 13

Charity Academy is the small private school already referred to which functioned briefly in the Mugunda catchment area several years ago. The writer does not tell us about his move back to his original school.

Other accounts focus on descriptions of the family. Most families are supportive, and feelings towards parents are generally warm:

> My family is made up of five members. It is made up of father mother my two brothers and I. I like reading very much. My father works as a driver and my mother as a farmer…. I like my parents very much
>
> Boy, 13

> My life is enjoyable because from when I was born I have never sleep without food or without having basic (needs) like to be educated, to have clothes, food and shelter and I am (a) healthy person. My family is good but not so rich or even poor. My family can afford to pay my school fees and food
>
> Boy, 15

For one pupil, being the only girl in the family brings benefits:

> My family is not very rich and not very poor. God has helped us to see food for eating. One thing that makes me happy is that I am the only girl in the family the others are just boys. One day my mother told me we can go to Nairobi…. When we finished packing I asked my mother about my brothers. She told me that girls are the ones going (on) tour….
>
> Girl, 14

But not all pupils are so fortunate. Despite Mugunda's fertile soils, some families experience food shortages:[23]

> My family is good we are all alive. It is made up by eight people…. some days we are not feeding well. It is what makes me to feel unhappy
>
> Boy, 15

Families are often very large:

> When I was born my parents liked me very much…. My family is made up of eleven children. It is a happy family. I like it because it is a rich family. My parents are tea farmers and my brothers and sisters are working. Only me I am at school.
>
> Girl, 14

> My family is made up of nine members. There are seven children. I am very happy with my parents because they protect me from any danger. They provide me with all basic needs…. I have four brothers and two sisters. My older brother and sister helps my parents to cultivate the land that my parents have.
>
> Girl, 13

[23] Because a high proportion of the land is planted to tea, many families are largely dependent on purchased foodstuffs.

> My family is made up of father, mother and children. I am happy about my father because he is finding work…. so we can get food for every day…. My mother is a tea farmer she is the best farmer in the village. My family has got seven children.
>
> Girl, 15

One pupil, a girl, starts her essay with a comment about the problems of large families:

> I am fourteen years old and I would like to be a teacher later on…. My aim is to get two children a boy and a girl. I would not like many children because I would get many problems of finding a lot of food….
> I am sad because we do not have many tea leaves and…. just two cows….
>
> Girl, 14

Examination pressures seem less intense than for pupils in most urban schools. A number mention the coming KCPE but in most cases aspirations are not especially high:

> In my KCPE I want to get good marks and go to a good secondary school
>
> Boy, 13

> For now I am in Standard 8 and I want to get 300 marks in my KCPE exam
>
> Boy, 15

A mark of 300 would have qualified this boy for a place at a district secondary school in 2006, but to enter a provincial secondary school he would have needed a score of at least 340.

For many pupils, the highlight of their lives so far has been a trip away from Mugunda village, sometimes as a reward for school success. One has travelled only as far as Nyeri town, about 25km away, but is still excited about it:

> It was on December 25th when my mother told me that (I) can go to Nyeri. I was as happy as a king…. because my mother bought for me new shoes and new dress which even today I still remember
>
> Girl, 15

Others have been further:

> The thing that made me very happy I went to visit Nairobi. (Until then) I was only saying that our capital city is Nairobi but I was not knowing where it was…. I went with my father I was very happy because I visited Uhuru Park and I saw big (buildings). That day…. I will never forget
>
> Boy, 15

> My grandmother took me…. to Lake Nakuru. When we reached there I saw many things like flamingos. That day I was happy…. When it was time to come back I was feeling I cannot come.
>
> Boy, 15

Although most Mugunda pupils perceive their families as warm and supportive, there are exceptions:

> My life was very difficult because my mother leave us when we were still young…. But my grandmother came…. and take us. She was feeding us as if (we were) her own children…. My grandmother was carrying us many times when she was going to work. She was leaving us on a bank of tea leaves. I was looking after my brother very well….
> My hope for…. years coming I would like to be a doctor and to be a good parent not like my mother
>
> Girl, 15

> The thing that make me feel bad is (that) my parents leave me and go to stay in the town…. They left me with my young brother and sister. Now we are staying alone and we don't have anyone to help
>
> Boy, 15

4.3.2 Baraza

Although Baraza is further from Nyeri town than Mugunda, it is nevertheless in some respects less isolated. As we saw in Chapter W, the Baraza community is relatively new: it was formed about 45 years ago when a large European-owned farm was subdivided for African settlement. Many of the new settlers came from the traditional ('reserve') areas to the south and west of Nyeri town, and generally retain ties with their original homes to this day. There were more transferees from other schools at Baraza than at Mugunda (about one-third of the Standard 8 class, compared with only about one in ten at Mugunda); and about two-thirds of these transferees came from the Nyeri 'reserve' areas. All the transferees were from public schools: Baraza is clearly not attractive for pupils leaving the private schools.

Repetition, we learned in Chapter 3, extends schooling histories at Baraza much more than at any of the other schools visited, and often well beyond the eight years officially set for the primary schooling cycle. In 2007 the median Standard 8 pupil had been enrolled at Baraza for nearly nine years; about six months longer than the median pupil at Mugunda. About nine out of ten pupils had repeated at least one grade, and about four in ten had repeated twice or three times.

The repetition profile at Baraza contrasts with that at Mugunda. As we have seen, Mugunda pupils repeat most often in Standard 1. But at Baraza, repetition is heavily concentrated in the final two grades. Of the 40 repetition-years experienced by the 26 pupils in our Standard 8 Baraza sample, only two were in Standard 1; and one of these was at another school before the pupil moved to Baraza. In striking contrast, as many as 13 repetition-years were experienced in Standard 8 and a further nine in Standard 7 – all at Baraza school. Nearly half the 2007 Standard 8 pupils were in the class for a second year, and one was in her third year!

The patterns suggest that the reasons for repetition differ between Mugunda and Baraza. In the perception of a Mugunda infant teacher, repetition at that school is frequent in Standard 1 because the local pre-school groups do not provide adequate preparation for new primary entrants. But at Baraza, teachers seem to be more concerned with

buttressing pupils' learning in advance of the KCPE examination than with the development of basic skills in the early years.

Baraza school has an attached pre-school unit, currently attended by 47 pupils. Equipment is sparse; apart from an alphabet chart, no learning materials were visible in either of the two classrooms. The fees are only 500 Kenya shillings per term (about $US9), but according to the principal:

> *Most parents resist the pre-school charge. Only about half pay. They say that primary is free, so pre-primary should be free too. Sometimes we allow pupils to enter Standard 1 without pre-primary.*

There was much variation in the quality of the autobiographies written at Baraza. A few accounts were fluent and vivid; others were difficult to understand; some virtually incomprehensible.

Although Free Primary Education had little if any impact on enrolments at Baraza, it made a substantial difference to the lives of many pupils already attending:

> I started school in Baraza nursery school when I was just five years. In 1996 (sic) I was taken to Baraza primary school. (My parents were paying) the school fee from standard one, two, three (2 years), four and five. From 2003 (in) the second term the Government started the free primary education….
> (FPE) has done a lot of good things. Before it commenced I used to be sent home each and every day for school fees….
>
> Boy, 16

> (In our school) we have good teachers. We are given text books and exercise books, food, pencils and biro pens. All these come from the government. I thank our government for giving us free education. I hope it will give us free secondary education.
>
> Boy, 15

> The government have helped us with free primary education…. and with abundant food from USA
>
> Boy, 16

The families sending their children to Baraza form two quite distinct communities: the farmers, living on the smallholdings created around the time of Independence by the subdivision of a large tract of ranchland previously owned by Europeans; and the squatters, many of them previously charcoal burners from the Aberdare forest, living in a congested informal settlement on public land adjacent to the school. Poverty levels are high in both communities.

Several pupils from farming families write of their admiration for their parents' efforts to provide basic needs. For this girl, her parents are role models:

> I am happy because my parents are hard working they show us how to work hard at school so that we can enter secondary school. My father was working in the shamba

> every morning and evening and my mother was waking at crack of dawn to find what we will eat.
>
> Girl, 15

However incomes from farming are low:

> At home we meet many difficulties. My parents work as farmers and they earn very little money. Sometimes there is no paraffin so I read using an ember…. At this time my parents have hired land so that I can go to secondary school
>
> Girl, 14

> At home my mother is a farmer. When she harvests something she sells and buys something else. When I told her to give me three hundred shillings to pay for KCPE she told me she doesn't have money for exam but (to) buy us food
>
> Girl, 16

Food is often short. Without fertilizers, yields from land better suited to livestock rearing than to agriculture are generally poor:

> I am not sure that I can enter secondary school because my father is very sick and the land where we can plant some cash crops the soil has become already exhausted. We are planting vegetables but they are not growing (well)…. We cannot leave it to be bush because we have no other land to plant our food crops.
>
> Girl, 15

Anxieties that parents will be unable to provide support for secondary schooling are widespread: [24]

> My parents tried their best but (they are)…. unemployed. They try to look (after) us when they can…. (but) they cannot find my secondary fees….
>
> Boy, 17

> One thing that makes me cry when I'm alone and I start thinking about my life. If my father did not go to the land of no return I would go to secondary school. My mother told me she can't take me to secondary school because of fees.
>
> Girl, 16

Ironically, the only pupil who expresses confidence he will have the resources he needs to enter secondary school has little respect for his parents. Brewing illicit liquor (busaa) for sale in the informal shantytown brings them a steady income:

[24] The essays were written after the Government announcement that secondary schooling would be free as from 2008, but it seems that many Baraza pupils were unaware of this.

> My parents are busaa cookers and drinkers. Sometimes…. they make me very sad because if they drink at night there is a lot of noise and sometimes they fight each other…. (and we cannot) sleep well…. I pray God (that I will not) become a busaa user…. From my younger stage up to now I have never tasted any drug and I will never taste. My parents give us everything we want except peace…. When they sell busaa they buy us food clothing or any other need we have. They tell me to keep up and get good marks. Money is not a problem we will take you to secondary school
>
> Boy, 15

4.4 Nairobi ex-high cost public school (Kisasa)

To move from reading the essays written by Mugunda and Baraza pupils to those written by the pupils at Kisasa is to enter another economic, social and experiential world. Kisasa pupils, we saw in the previous chapter, come from more privileged backgrounds than pupils at any of the other public schools we visited. Virtually all breadwinners were educated past the primary level, and most have white-collar jobs or are self-employed businessmen. Although none are full-time farmers, about four-fifths own agricultural land, which is generally worked by labourers rather than by family members alone.

Enrolment patterns are likewise strongly contrasted. Whereas most Standard 8 pupils at Mugunda and Baraza have received all their education at their current school, more than half their Kisasa counterparts had been recruited from other schools, many in the past two years.

Among the 17 Kisasa recruits, only five came from other public schools. They included two from another Nairobi ex-high cost school; and two from regular Nairobi schools.

The other twelve pupils were recruited from private schools, the majority located in or near a township which has been developing rapidly as a dormitory suburb in recent years, located not far from the school but just outside the Nairobi City boundary. Seven of these private-school recruits have complex educational histories involving more than one transfer, generally among private schools. For the pupil who tells her story in Box 4. 5 these repeated moves have been the source of much stress. Her father, a graduate professional, died in a plane crash, since when her mother – also a professional - has struggled to meet the needs of six children.

Box 4.5
The stress of repeated school transfers

After my father died…. my mother took me to a school in Nairobi…. That school was good, but my mother couldn't afford the bus fare. I learned there for three years then I was transferred to a boarding school…. That school was in Eastern province. The school was very dirty but the performance was high…. My body reacted with the food and water and mostly the climate. I suffered homesick(ness) that made me acquire ulcers.

I had to be transferred and was taken to another boarding school in Eldoret. That school was…. very good. I was comfortable with everything. There were many co-curriculum activities which made the mind relaxed. One day when I was in school…. (I was called) to the common room where we used to study and told my mother had come….

Unfortunately she told me I had to come with her she would explain at home. I packed my bags crying because I really liked my school. We reached home and then she told me that I had to transfer because she couldn't afford paying fees for us and there was free education.

That is when I joined Kisasa school in 2005 and I was in class six. I met new friends and teachers who later on…. became blessings to me. Free education saved me so much. My life finally became settled the minute I came to Kisasa. There was a time in class seven I had not paid tuition money for two consecutive months my class teacher did not chase me from class neither did she discriminate me from the rest who had paid.

Girl, 15

It is noteworthy that although long-term economic pressures led to this pupil's move to Kisasa, her mother delayed transferring her until 2005 - two years after the introduction of free primary education in the public schools. Patterns are similar among the eleven other Standard 8 pupils who transferred to Kisasa from a private school: only three moved in 2003, the FPE year, whereas seven moved between 2005 and 2007. Once the benefits – apparent or real - of a high-status private education have been experienced, they are not lightly given up.

One pupil associates his transfer – in this case from another ex-high cost school - with a drop in examination performance:

> In 2006 I transferred from Westlands school and here…. in class seven my seriousness stopped and I let my adolescent stage take control of my life. My marks dropped from three hundred and eighty two to three hundred and twenty four…. (But) in the second term I changed my habit and I started being serious with my life and education. I am increasing my marks every exam.
>
> Boy, 14

Perceptions of Kisasa school are mixed. Most pupils have nothing but praise:

> When I was five my parents brought me to this school which (I have been in) since the pre-school unit. I think this school should not be even called good it should be

called best. Our compound is located at a very beautiful place where there are trees, there is water, and furniture is good….
(The teachers) teach very well. They teach until you understand…. They have taught me how to be responsible and careful with my studies….
My happiest moment is when I'm in class listening to teachers. I thank them very much.

Boy, 14

In my school I love everything starting from the good environment and the good people around me…. I love my teachers and in my sincerity I have not seen anything unfair.

Girl, 12

The teachers in this school are very caring. They teach the pupils properly and make sure all of them understand

Girl, 14

My school always makes me happy, especially my class. I am the tallest pupil…. Some pupils…. call me names but I don't care about them. I always have self control. Our school performs well in examinations. We often (are in) position two or three but sometimes in position one….

Boy, 14

Others, however, have more ambivalent feelings:

I am very glad of the system of education in our school…. Our President introduced free education…. The books I am given have been bought by the Ministry of Education. My experience in the school has been good and sometimes bad. I have done many mistakes and I have been punished severely. I hate the beatings I am given…. (They) make me angry with everyone. Tears of sadness roll down my cheeks. But I am glad (there are) great things I love about my school. (We have) well-educated teachers. They help me learn more about our world. I love science and the teacher. Our school (compound) is covered with plants that I learn about in class.

Girl, 12

Two pupils who have been in the school since Standard 1 remember with a certain nostalgia conditions before FPE:

My school…. has about 1200 students but it is not over-populated. I joined…. when I was only seven years old. (At) that time we were paying school fees, the amount was seven hundred shillings (per month) only…. Our toilets were very clean because there was a lot of water and there were many workers in our school. Since free primary education started it brought advantages and disadvantages. The advantages are we are given exercise books text books and stationary. The disadvantages are our toilets are very dirty and they produce stench. We sweep our classes because there are no workers to sweep.

Boy, 14

Since free education our school has been a little different. Each class has fifty or more pupils. We do not have enough teachers for our school but still we learn.

Boy, 15

Perceptions of life away from school vary widely. For many, the family is a source of support and affection:

> Since I was a young child, I have always loved my life…. My family supports me very much. Whenever I need them they are all there to help me in whatever problem I have. I am always happy to be with my family. I can say it is very rare for me to be sad.
>
> Boy, 14

> My mother treated me well as an infant till now an adolescent boy. I thank her for not throwing me (out) like what other mothers do. It is very sad to hear a child has been…. abandoned on television at seven o'clock…. My father…. treats us well too. (He) buys me clothes and even pays my school fees. Without him I could not be here today
>
> Boy, 14

A relaxed acceptance of the advantages of a relatively privileged lifestyle in a pleasant neighbourhood is expressed in a number of accounts:

> I love our little town since it has everything you need to live a comfortable life. It has a library, an ice-cream parlour, beauty salons and video game arcades. It also has a flea market where you can buy things at a pretty fair bargain. My absolute favourite is the library. I love reading novels, comic books history books and so on…. It relaxes my mind and takes me to a whole new different world.
>
> Girl, 14

> I love to spend time on the computer. I love listening to music, playing computer games, video games, spending time with my friends. I also love eating junk food.
>
> Boy, 14

> On Saturdays I go to my neighbour's house to ride bicycles…. When we are bored (my friend and I) sometimes go swimming or to ride horses. My favourite is riding the horses because I love animals.
>
> Girl, 14

Not all, however, are equally at ease. Family disruption has exposed several to economic and psychic stress:

> I have two sisters and four brothers. I come from a single-parent family due to my father and mother divorcing…. I like my family very much though we are not so financially stable…. I don't like people who brag a lot because they are better off than others
>
> Boy, 15

> My parents are very caring but they are separated…. It all started when my father used to come home late and (abuse) my mother. We used to get so stressed because we used to get in the middle of it.
> All of the chaos and stress gave me and my siblings a hard time. We never concentrated in class because we used to wonder what would happen if we left (our parents) alone in the house…. One morning my mother agreed that enough was enough…. She packed our bags together with hers and we moved….
>
> Girl, 14

For a number it is the community they live in, rather than family life, which is the source of stress. As we saw in Chapter 2, Kisasa school is located in a low-density suburb, largely the preserve of middle- and upper-income families, on the outskirts of Nairobi. Formerly farming land reserved in colonial times for Europeans, the area has retained much of its rural character. But among the spacious homes and well-kept gardens a number of informal squatter settlements have sprung up in recent years. Several writers are troubled by the threat they perceive these settlements to pose.

> Life outside my school has never been so easy to me…. Some people out there are bad people especially those…. who call themselves 'mungiki'. I hate living in (a) criminal town. There is a small slum at the back of our school. It has too many people who commit crimes. Some of them abuse drugs even in public, others steal…. In this slum there is no security. If someone is caught doing a crime he/she is beaten to death. A simple term is mob justice. I don't like that slum.
>
> Boy, 14

> My life outside the school is somehow difficult. Sometimes I meet with street boys who like cracking jokes about me. Sometimes the jokes make me very angry and I tell my dad. My life at home has made me very different (from them)….
>
> Girl, 12

> Life outside the school has not been that easy because I have had so many trials…. Many people have been mischievous with our family. Especially the time when boys start checking you out and you start resisting them. Some of them really hate you…. I have my life to lead so I don't really care what people think about me.
>
> Girl, 14

> I am afraid of the outside life because there are many things that someone can come across for example drugs, being raped, being a robber due to failing the examination, and contracting HIV/Aids from prostitutes. So I have to be careful with my life.
>
> Boy 14

4.5 Group 5: Private schools (St Thomas and Starlight Academy)

The final group is made up of the two private schools we visited: St Thomas in Nyeri and Starlight Academy in Nairobi. As we have seen, the schools share many characteristics in common. Pupils come from relatively privileged families: most guardians are well-educated, many to university level, and more than half have white-collar occupations. Educational histories, however, are unstable: most pupils moved to St Thomas or Starlight Academy after Standard 1, some having attended several previous schools.

But despite these regularities in the aggregate statistics, a closer perspective shows that each school has its distinctive character: they are far from being copies taken from the same template. We discuss each school in turn, starting with St Thomas.

4.5.1 St Thomas

Only a minority of the pupils who graduated from St Thomas in 2007 had received all their education there: in a class of 27 they numbered just seven (26%). Among the other

20 who had arrived as transferees, recruits from other private schools predominated: they outnumbered those from public schools by three to one. Most private-school recruits came from considerable distances - they included three from Nairobi, two from Thika, two from Mombasa, two from Kisii, and two from the Rift Valley – suggesting that a change of residence was the most frequent reason for the move.

With its 2006 KCPE ranking of 68th among 102 Nyeri private schools, St Thomas is not an attractive destination for private-school transferees seeking improved examination prospects. By contrast the five public-school transferees all came from nearby Nyeri schools, four of them schools with weaker KCPE records than St Thomas.

There is an open-door recruitment policy at St Thomas. As we saw in Chapter 2, enrolments have declined drastically in recent years, and so, being largely dependent on fee income, the school has had little choice but to accept all applicants without regard to their academic strengths or weaknesses. The Principal commented:

> *The school is non-selective. We accept every student who applies. Many newcomers are very weak. We find out which subjects they are weakest in, and tutor them every evening and on Saturdays*

Most new entrants are recruited late in the primary cycle, so the potential impact on the school's KCPE ranking is considerable. Among the 20 transferees in our Standard 8 sample, as many as five had entered during the current school year, while a further ten had entered in Standard 6 or 7.

Staff turnover is as much of an issue as student turnover. St Thomas is unable to match Teachers' Service Commission salaries; in consequence the school lost four of its 13 teachers to public schools during the past year.

Repetition is a fairly frequent experience among St Thomas pupils: among the 27 pupils in Standard 8, eleven (41%) had repeated at least one class since starting their education. However this high proportion is misleading: it does not reflect the school's repetition policy. More than half the repetition-years took place at a previous school, before the pupil came to St Thomas. Among the seven pupils who were enrolled at St Thomas from Standard 1, only two have repeated.

As we would anticipate from the Principal's comments about the school's recruitment policy, there was considerable variation in the quality of the autobiographies the Standard 8 pupils wrote. While some showed a shaky command of English grammar and syntax, others displayed an easy language fluency, suggesting in a few cases wider exposure to an Anglophone environment than that likely to have been provided by the school:

> This place has a suitable climate for learning…. The pupils are friendly and that makes one comfortable….
>
> Girl, 14

Some pupils certainly come from widely-travelled families:

> My mother is a teacher in Burundi. My father is a manager in Mombasa. My sister is in one of the universities in the United States of America. I am in a boarding school here in Nyeri…. I am good at languages especially English. English is my best subject and it is also my mother's best subject.
>
> Girl, 13

> After my (secondary) education I would love to be a bachelor of science and go to Canada for my university like my sister….
>
> Girl, 14

In one respect the St Thomas autobiographies are unique: with only a few exceptions they portray the writer's life, whether at school, at home, or with friends, as being essentially problem-free.

School life is challenging but rewarding:

> St Thomas is a very good school. I joined when I was eleven…. We have been extremely sharpened by our teachers in discipline and academics.
>
> Boy, 14

> Here the education is not free since it is a private school. The standards of education are very high and one needs to work very hard.
>
> Boy, 13

Pupils have high aspirations for their future education and careers. Several see their parents' example as a model to be followed:

> After working hard and fulfilling my dream of becoming the best candidate in the national examinations, I would like to emulate my father by joining Maseno high school
>
> Boy, 15

It is of interest that all six pupils who nominate a high school they would like to attend choose a public rather than a private secondary school. Four choose a national catchment school – long-established, prestigious and highly selective – the remaining two a middle-ranking provincial school.

Families are highly supportive:

> I love my family very much. Most of the time we spend the time together. We eat together and also pray together. We like helping our neighbour and the poor. I am the last born in our family. My big brother like playing with me. And they usually buy me many things….
>
> Girl, 13

> The happiest moment in my day-(to)-day life is when I am with my family (or) at school…. I usually feel that my family is the best family in the whole world. There is peace, love and unity among the members.
>
> Boy, 13

> At home we are jovial, no stress, everyone is as happy as a toothless mother whose got a dental replacement before a party. We share ideas about different ideas and facts. At home we are all together and cooperative.
>
> Girl, 14

> Life as myself has always been important to me. How I look, what people think about me, and what I want them to think about me are some of the questions I ask myself…. what I want is to have a simple life, filled with God's blessings. I want a life which will make my mother feel proud and make her not regret the decision of having me….
>
> Girl, 13

> What I consider most important in my life is my mum. This is because she is loving and cares for me most. She has always been there for me whenever I have been in problems. My father has also been an important pillar in my life.
>
> Boy, 13

And leisure time with friends is enjoyable:

> I come from a middle class family not very rich not very poor. I am the only child, no brothers no sisters…. I like hanging about with my friends reading novels, swimming, watching movies and making friends
>
> Girl, 15

> Swimming is my hobby. When I am free I go swimming with my friends in the nearby pool. Besides swimming, I also like watching movies and playing basketball
>
> Boy, 15

In one of the few exceptions, a pupil writes of the misery she suffered when her parents separated. But her story has a happy ending:

> My life, I have always thought of it as a joke. Sometimes it is a misery while sometimes it is like being in paradise…. Life at home was a little bit tough when I was young. I was about seven years when my father claimed to be going for a trip. Once he went, he never came back. One month later, my mother found out he was married. I had never imagined myself having a step-mother.
> Thinking of the worst that could happen to us, I sobbed myself to sleep that night. As I went on with life…. we improved our living standard and this always makes me happy. I love my mother…. very much.
>
> Girl, 13

While another pupil, a late recruit who transferred from a low-performing public school when he was in Standard 6, still suffers academic stress:

> In class I was always last and that could make me very angry and start shedding tears…. My parents comforted me…. but my effort bore no fruits
>
> Boy, 19

4.5.2 Starlight Academy

Schooling instability is commoner at Starlight Academy than at any of the other schools, private or public, we visited. In our Standard 8 sample of 54 pupils, only nine, or 17%, had been at the school since Standard 1. Furthermore most recruitment occurs late in the schooling cycle: among the 45 transferees, as many as 33 (73%) were recruited into the upper grades (Standards 5 to 8).

As at St Thomas, recruits from other private schools predominated: they outnumbered recruits from public schools by a ratio of more than five to one. However the catchment area is more restricted. Among the 37 private-school transferees, 20 (54%) came from Nairobi City and nine (24%) from Kiambu District, while seven of the remaining eight came from other parts of Central Province. Among the eight public-school transferees, all except two were from Nairobi. The patterns suggest that Starlight Academy, a relatively new school, is not as yet widely known outside its own local area.

Most private-school recruits had a history of schooling instability before arriving at Starlight Academy. Among the 37, twelve (32%) had attended two previous schools, while a further ten (27%) had attended three or more schools. Patterns were similar among public-school recruits: exactly half (four out of eight) had attended more than one previous school.

For public-school transferees, academic concerns were clearly a major factor propelling the move to Starlight Academy. In the four public schools for which the data were available, mean scores in the 2006 KCPE ranged from 219 to 314; compared with the Starlight Academy mean of c. 360. So in all cases the move led to a considerable hike up the 'KCPE gradient'. However for the private-school transferees the pattern is less clear. The five available KCPE means range from 356 to 380; roughly the same as the Starlight Academy mean. Hence it seems evident that there were other, non-academic, reasons for the transfer.

In their autobiographies, several of the transferees from public schools discuss the introduction of FPE, and its effects on the quality of instruction:

> (After pre-school) I was taken to (a public school). At that time free education had not yet been introduced so I was paying fees as I am now. (When) the Government introduced free education I was so happy…. I did not know the disadvantages. We were so crowded one desk was sat (in) by around seven pupils.
> The teacher used to come to teach but he did not mark…. or it was very rare. Teachers were teaching but they had no (choice). They had to do what the government had said. Free education has some…. advantages one is that: at least somebody learns something up to class eight. It may (allow) those who are poor to make it….
>
> Boy, 14

> My parents took me to (a public school) where I continued learning…. We were so congested…. you could not have time to ask questions…. There were few materials.

> Desks were few and some were forced to sit on the floor. The teacher could not…. mark our books and so one could not know where he or she had gone wrong….
>
> Girl, 14

> We came to Nairobi because my mother was transferred to a job in Nairobi. (She) took me to (a public school) in class two where (I stayed) up to class six…. At (that school) the teachers were skipping some topics. For instance the science teacher skipped the first topic and went to the fourth topic. Many times the teacher did not come or give us some homework. When we finished the first term in class six, I was transferred…. to Starlight Academy.
>
> Boy, 14

But for this pupil the move to Starlight was academically stressful; the missed lessons were clearly a handicap. His account continues:

> When I did the interview I did not pass well. The headmaster felt mercy on me and I joined the school. I joined (the stream)…. which newcomers could join. (When) we did internal exams, I was always the fourth last in the whole class six.

Since class six, however, prospects have brightened:

> I…. worked hard and I started improving. I try in exams and I am always improving. I continued and now I am in class 8 and in (a higher stream)

While moving from school to school is a familiar experience for most Starlight Academy pupils, repetition is not. Of the 54 Standard 8 pupils in our sample, just six (11%) had repeated a year since entering Standard 1, and four of these pupils had repeated at a previous school, before moving to Starlight Academy. Both the pupils who repeated at Starlight Academy did so immediately after transferring from another school.

Pupils at Starlight Academy have high aspirations for their future. As at St Thomas, all the pupils who nominate a secondary school they would like to attend choose a school in the public rather than the private sector. All eleven choices, without exception, are for prestigious national-catchment schools. Boys particularly favour Lenana, one of four ex high-cost secondary schools in Nairobi reserved for Europeans during the colonial period:

> My dream school is Lenana High School…. because I have heard many good stories about the teaching there, the discipline, and on top of that it has good (examination) scores. It (is among the) top ten in the nation and next time I hope to see it among the top five
>
> Boy, 13

It is evident that these pupils are not permanently committed to private education; rather, private primary education is seen as a stepping-stone to the desirable opportunities available in the most-selective public secondary schools.

In setting high aspirations for themselves, several pupils are aware they are following a family tradition:

> In my long line of family members, they all passed. My mother went to Alliance girls…. I try to prepare, and to realize my dream of going to Mangu high like my brother, and becoming an accountant like my mother
>
> Boy, 14

> Both my parents are educated and they are successful…. Now I only hope that I can be successful in life like my parents
>
> Boy, 13

The benefits of being in a private school are well appreciated:

> Being in a private school is a wonderful thing. Not all Kenyans can get the money to live a happy life as I do
>
> Boy, 13

But the competitiveness of school life is a source of stress for a boy from the lowest stream:

> (In class five) we did the end of year examinations. I failed but managed to get a seat in class six. The first day…. I decided to sit at the back of the class because I feared being asked too many questions….
>
> Boy, 13

There is concern – benign, if somewhat distanced - for those less privileged than themselves who attend public primary schools and have benefited from free primary education:

> I am pleased with the present government of Kibaki. It needs praise for sparing the public school parents…. (from) paying fees. It's a…. relief to them.
>
> Boy, 13

> I wish the free education to continue so as to assist children from poor families to get educated
>
> Boy, 13

One pupil, while approving of FPE, nevertheless views private primary education as the norm, and public education as the alternative:

> I like what President Kibaki has brought. The free education enables children to have a chance to go to school and learn new things. The life of parents is now easy…. If a parent cannot manage to take a child to a private school the child may get another chance in a public school
>
> Girl, 13

The benefits of family life are well appreciated:

> The thing I like about my family is that we are united. We help each other and never quarrel. We are taken care of and guided by our parents…. (But) we have little time to be together. When it is school days we don't see each other for about a month which makes me a sad boy.
>
> Boy, 14

Although as at every school visited, some pupils must cope with family disruption, and the stress it leads to:

> Unfortunately I do not have a father. Until now I do not know who my father is, and I wish very much to see him face to face….
> Every time I hear pupils talk about their father I feel bad…. Every time pupils ask me about my father I ignore (them) and change the subject. I really wonder why my mother has not told me who my father is.
>
> Girl, 13

Starlight Academy, as we have noted, is situated in a rapidly-developing middle-income suburb to the north of Nairobi City. But while home life is generally perceived as benign, the locality is not:

> People live day by day with a fearful environment. And what do they fear? 'Mungiki'. This group has been making our lives miserable by their violent killing…. I wish I was there to fight the Mugikis. I would have killed all of them
>
> Boy, 13

Chapter 5 Access to Primary Education and the 2003 FPE Initiative: Four Issues

In this final chapter we discuss four issues concerning access to primary education and the 2003 Free Primary Education initiative which have emerged from our analyses in the previous chapters.

5.1 The uneven impact of the 2003 FPE initiative

The Free Primary Education (FPE) initiative of 2003, like its two predecessors in 1974 and 1979, made a substantial impact on school enrolments, especially at intake level. The national Standard 1 class increased by some 33%, from 0.960m in 2002 to 1.276m in 2003. Enrolments at all higher grades also increased, although by smaller proportions.

Comparable increases during the first two FPE initiatives were much higher: the Standard 1 intake rose by 152% in 1974, and 63% in 1979 (Somerset, 2007)[25]. At the time there were, of course, proportionately many more out-of-school children still to be tapped.

However the effects of the 2003 FPE initiative were unevenly distributed. Among the seven public schools visited during this study – three in Nairobi City, four in Nyeri District - clear evidence that FPE had had a major impact on enrolments could be seen in only two: Tangazo and Majani, both located in Nairobi.

At these two schools the effects were massive. The Standard 1 intake at Tangazo nearly quadrupled, from less than 100 in 2002 to nearly 350 in 2003. The increase at Majani was less spectacular but still substantial: from 391 to 680, or nearly 75%. The pupils at these schools come almost entirely from low-income urban families; many of those at Majani are the sons or daughters of domestic servants, while pupils at Tangazo live mainly in Kibera, one of Africa's largest informal squatter settlements. In striking contrast, the intake at Kisasa, a Nairobi public school which draws its pupils mainly from relatively-privileged families, actually dropped in the FPE year: to 164 from 173 the previous year.

No real evidence of FPE impact could be seen at any of the four Nyeri public schools visited, with the partial exception of Mugunda, where the Standard 1 intake rose a little, from 54 in 2002 to 63 in 2003. Nyeri, however, has some special features. Educational development in Nyeri started earlier, and progressed more rapidly, than in most other parts of Kenya. As early as 1950 African political leaders in Nyeri and adjacent districts were expressing dissatisfaction with the slow pace of educational expansion, and were pressing for the introduction of compulsory primary education for African children – to place them at par with children of European and Asian descent. (Kenya Government Development Plan, 1954-57). It seems that the two previous FPE initiatives, of 1973 and 1979, brought any remaining pockets of Nyeri out-of-school children into the system, leaving little for the third initiative to achieve.

[25] All references in this chapter to the 1974 and 1979 FPE initiatives come from this source.

A parallel study being conducted in Kajiado and Kisii – two rural districts perhaps more typical than Nyeri of Kenya as a whole - has produced less diverse results. In six of the seven public schools visited, Standard 1 enrolments rose in the FPE year, by proportions ranging from 20% to just over 50% - in line with the national trend. (Oketch, forthcoming).

From such a small sample of schools it is clearly impossible to reach firm conclusions as to the factors influencing FPE impact. Socioeconomic factors were of course very important: the new recruits to Tangazo and Majani came predominantly from disadvantaged families, for whom the cost-sharing contributions required at the public schools before 2003 clearly constituted a barrier to access. Historical factors were also relevant: as we have just noted, FPE effects were minimal in Nyeri, a district with a long record of commitment to primary education. Geographic factors also played a part: it is likely that some of the strongest effects were experienced in the cities and larger towns, in schools drawing their pupils mainly from low-cost housing areas or informal settlements. Gender may also have contributed; although the number of girls entering primary school had already reached near-parity with the number of boys as far back as the mid-1990s, so the scope for further change was limited[26].

5.2 Enrolment trends since FPE implementation

It is still too early to determine with any confidence national enrolment trends in the years which followed the 2003 FPE initiative. From the interim statistics available so far it appears that the initial enrolments have dropped, but the numbers are likely to be revised upwards when final, more complete, data are available.[27] With the first (1973) FPE initiative, dropout from the initial intake cohort was massive, so that by the time the pupils reached the final primary grade (Standard 7 at the time) the survivors amounted to less than 37% of the original intake. With the second (1979) initiative dropout was even steeper: the FPE intake cohort was reduced to only 35% of its original size by Standard 7.

As we saw in Chapter 2, the 2003 FPE intake gains at the two high-impact schools in our study (Tangazo and Majani) have so far been sustained quite well. By 2007, when the FPE cohort had reached Standard 5, the apparent retention rate amounted to 85% at Tangazo; more than 70% at Majani.

A further trend, however, is less favourable, and indeed cause for considerable concern: since the FPE year, new intakes have fallen steeply at both schools. Between 2003 and 2007 the Tangazo Standard 1 intake dropped from 342 to just 77 – a fall of no less than 77%. At Majani the fall is less dramatic but nevertheless substantial: from 97 to 51, or 47%. The Standard 1 intake at Tangazo is now considerably *lower* than it was in the immediate pre-FPE years, while at Majani it is roughly similar.

Without evidence from other high-impact schools, any interpretation of these trends must of course be tentative. However the patterns do suggest that the problems encountered

[26] In 1993, there were 94 girls admitted to Standard 1 for every 100 boys (Somerset, 2007).
[27] This has been a regular occurrence with Kenya educational statistics in the past.

during early FPE implementation affected negatively the schools' reputation, and hence their capacity to attract new recruits in subsequent years[28]. If this is the case, the private schools are likely to have been substantial beneficiaries. This is an issue to which we return in Section D below.

Non-fee costs are also likely to have contributed to declining enrolments in the post-FPE years, especially in the schools serving low-income communities. This was certainly the case with first and second FPE initiatives in1974 and 1979. After the first initiative, many schools were confronted with the need to construct large numbers of new buildings, to accommodate burgeoning school rolls. Schools raised the necessary funds by imposing a building levy on each family enrolling pupils. By the late 1970s, building levies were in some cases higher than the old, abolished school fee! The same response followed the second initiative of 1979; subsequently, with the inception of cost-sharing in the late 1980s, the requirement for parents to contribute to school funds was formalized.

With the current (2003) FPE initiative, the previous cost-sharing policy was reversed: the powers of schools to raise funds from parents are now tightly regulated. In Nyeri, formal approval from the district education administration is required before any levy can be imposed. At most of the public schools visited in 2007, buildings were clearly in need of maintenance, and will need substantial sums spent on them in the not-too-distant future.

But even at the schools where there are no maintenance levies, education is not cost-free. In their autobiographies pupils at several schools mention charges of various kinds, including a computer charge and charges for school trips. However the most widespread charge is the tutorial fee. At all the public schools visited, Standard 8 pupils preparing for the KCPE, and sometimes pupils in lower classes, are expected to attend tutorial classes outside regular school hours. The fees, which range from a few hundred shillings up to about 1,500 shillings ($US 24) per term, are a source of stress to those who cannot pay.

At one public school, the issue of the tutorial fee has become a bone of contention between teachers and a group of parents. The teachers argue that the tutorials are extracurricular, and therefore fall outside the regular, fee-free primary course. The parents counter that the material covered during the tutorials comes from the regular school curriculum, and therefore should be taught during regular school hours. A Standard 8 pupil felt strongly about the issue:

> The things which make me sad are…. children not going to school yet there is free education, and the way…. our parents (must) pay 500 shillings for tuition yet we continue with the syllabus
>
> Girl, 14

5.3 FPE, primary school stratification, and access to secondary school

We saw in Chapter 3 that the nine schools visited in this study draw their pupils from sharply-contrasted social and economic backgrounds. Table 3.1 shows that among the

[28] At the time, media coverage of these problems was extensive.

sampled Standard 8 pupils, the proportion with guardians working in white-collar occupations[29] varied from more than half at Kazi, Kisasa, Starlight Academy and St Thomas down to less than 5% at Tangazo, Majani and Mugunda – and none at all at Baraza. Similarly the proportion of guardians with post-primary education ranged from just 18% at Baraza to more than 90% at Kisasa and Starlight Academy, and 100% at St Thomas. Perhaps most striking of all: among guardians owning land, only 3% employed labourers to work on the land at Mugunda (one of our two rural schools); compared with well over 80% at Kisasa and St Thomas (both of them urban schools).

Furthermore, these socioeconomic measures are highly correlated with performance in the KCPE; the key examination which terminates the primary cycle and governs access to secondary education. The trends can be seen in Figures 5.1 and 5.2, on the next page. In both graphs the dependent variable (Y axis) is the school mean KCPE score in the 2006 examination. In Figure 5.1 the independent variable (X axis) is the proportion of Standard 8 pupils in our sample with guardians working in white-collar occupations; in Figure 5.2 it is the proportion with guardians educated past the primary level.

Both relationships are very close indeed.[30] The correlation coefficients (product-moment) are 0.92 and 0.94 respectively, indicating in each case well over 80% common variance. Knowledge of the school's socioeconomic catchment enables us to predict with a considerable degree of accuracy its performance in the KCPE, and hence, in all probability, its success in gaining places for its graduates at the most effective secondary schools. In Figure 5.2 we see Baraza school at the bottom of the trend line, with the lowest proportion of post-primary educated guardians among the nine schools visited (18%), and also the lowest mean KCPE score (171.90; nearly 80 points below the national average of 250). Moving up the trend line there is a group of four schools (Mugunda, Tangazo, Majani and Nafasi) in which the proportion of post-primary educated guardians is around 50%, and the mean KCPE score is close to the national average. Finally, in the top-right corner another group of four schools (Starlight Academy, St Thomas, Kisasa and Kazi) cluster closely around the trend line. The guardians of pupils attending these schools nearly all have post-primary education (the lowest proportion is 88%), while the KCPE means are all 50 points or more higher than the national average.

[29] Mainly professional (graduate and non-graduate) and clerical occupations.
[30] Despite the fact that the data come from different cohorts: the occupational data from the 2007 Standard 8 class; the KCPE data from the 2006 class.

Fig 5.1 Nairobi and Nyeri schools: Mean 2006 KCPE score, according to proportion of guardians in white-collar occupations

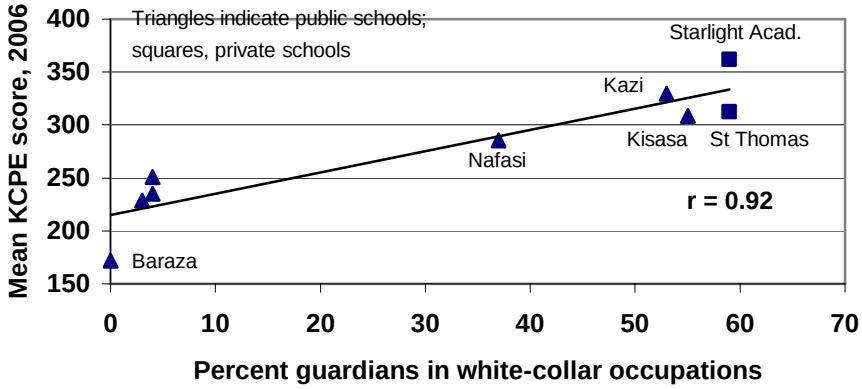
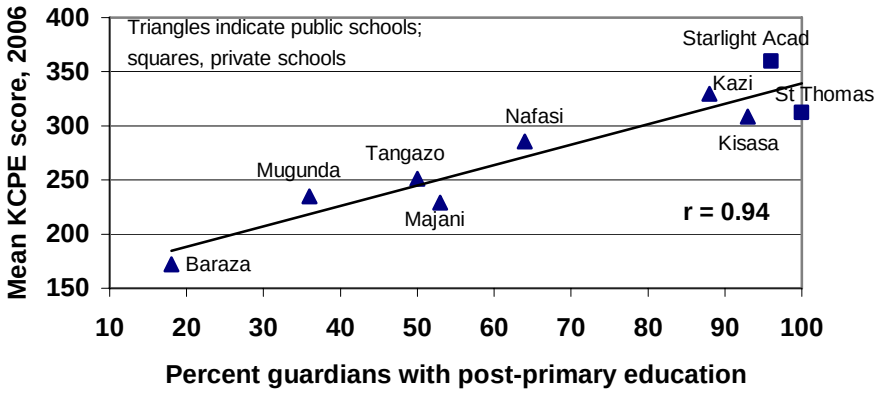


Fig 5.2 Nairobi and Nyeri schools: Mean 2006 KCPE score, according to proportion of guardians with post-primary education



It should be stressed that these correlations are calculated from a very small sample of schools; a sample, moreover, which was purposively selected to maximize geographic and socioeconomic variation. With a larger, randomly-selected sample of schools the coefficients would undoubtedly be somewhat lower. Nevertheless the closeness with which each school's KCPE performance mirrors the occupational and educational status of its catchment is impressive. With performance differences as wide as these, it is virtually certain that there will be massive differences in the proportions of pupils gaining access to secondary school – particularly to the prestigious national- and provincial-catchment schools

A further caveat is also important. Despite the strength of the relationship, we cannot interpret its meaning with any confidence, because at present only school-level performance data are available. Two contrasted explanations – at polar opposites along a continuum – are possible:

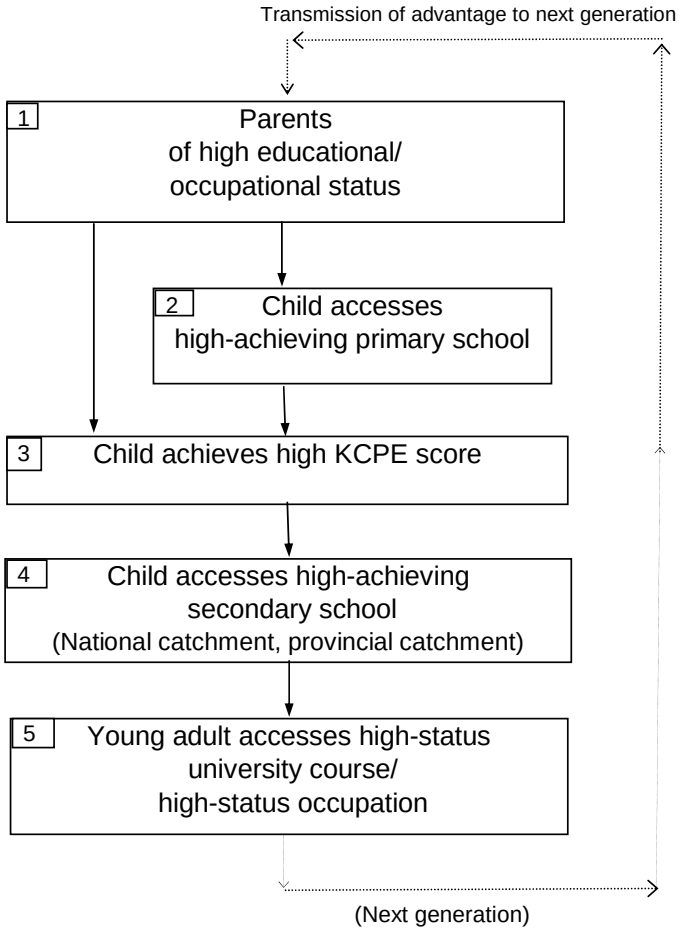
> 1. The differences are due mainly to *family background* factors. High-status guardians pass on cognitive advantages to their sons and daughters, either through the environment they provide at home, or through genetic inheritance, or a combination of both. The performance differences among schools reflect mainly differences in the potential of the pupils they recruit, rather than differences in their capacity to add cognitive value.
>
> 2. The differences are due mainly to *schooling* factors. High-status guardians gain privileged access to the primary schools which are most successful in adding cognitive value, either by paying fees or through other means. The differences in cognitive potential between their children and those recruited into less-successful schools are minimal.

The two alternatives are represented diagrammatically in Figure 5.3. The pathway linking Box 1 to Box 3 directly represents the home background alternative: children who succeed in the KCPE do so mainly because of the cognitive advantages their home background, or genetic potential, bestow on them. The pathway linking Box 1 to Box 3 through Box 2 represents the schooling alternative: children who succeed in the KCPE do so mainly because their parents or guardians are able to enrol them in the most-effective schools.

In all probability both home background and schooling factors contribute to KCPE success. But at the moment we cannot estimate the relative strength of each, because we lack pupil-level KCPE performance data.[31]

[31] Determining KCPE achievement levels for the pupils in our 2007 Standard 8 sample will be a high priority for Phase II of this study.

Figure 5.3 Pathways in transmission of educational and occupational advantage



The issue is of more than academic interest: it has major implications for policy. If the performance differences are due mainly to differences in school effectiveness, then support programs targeted at the weaker schools could be expected to have a major impact. But if on the other hand the differences are due mainly to home background factors, then early childhood development programmes, aimed at enriching the cognitive environment available to very young children from disadvantaged homes before they reach school age, might be more effective.

Whatever the relative contributions of home and school may be, it is clear from their actions that parents who are in a position to choose believe strongly that schools make a big difference. Starlight Academy, the most successful KCPE performer among the nine schools we visited, is a very popular choice – among parents for whom the high fee levels are not an insurmountable barrier. As we saw in Chapter 4, the school attracts large numbers of transferees from other schools, particularly into the upper standards. Less than one-fifth of the 2007 Standard 8 class had been at the school since Standard 1. To pupils from low-income families, Starlight is a closed-access school; but those who can

afford the fees, Starlight is near to being open-access. Although applicants are interviewed, selection criteria are relatively lenient – to the benefit of the school's income flow, even if perhaps at some cost to its KCPE standing.

Kazi, a public school only a little less successful in the KCPE than the private Starlight, also attracts many applications from would-be transferees. Kazi does not of course charge formal fees; nevertheless the school employs effective means to limit access, as the evidence presented in Chapter 4 demonstrates. About 60% of the 2007 Standard 8 pupils had received all their education at Kazi, while most of the remaining 40% had been accepted into the lower standards. Only two pupils had transferred into Standard 6 or 7, and none at all into Standard 8. In his interview with us the head teacher confirmed the school's regulated-access policy, while several pupils whose parents had managed to gain them admittance wrote in their autobiographies of the difficulties they had experienced.

Although Kazi's capitation grant is dependent on pupil numbers, maintenance of the school's KCPE status is of more concern than income flow. As we have seen Kazi is one of the most successful public schools in Nyeri district. In the 2006 KCPE it ranked 6th among 373 public schools; an achievement which was a source of pride to teachers, pupils and everyone else connected with the school. In our Standard 8 sample the relatively few transferees had all, without exception, come from schools of much lower KCPE ranking. If too many recruits from such schools had been accepted, especially into the upper standards, Kazi's proud KCPE record might well have been placed in jeopardy.

Kazi regulates not only transfers from other schools, but also the intake to Standard 1. As we saw in Chapter 4, the school manages, on-campus, a systematic pre-school programme; better-organised than the programmes we saw at any of the other eight schools visited. The course runs for two years, with examinations at the end of each year governing access to the next stage. The annual output – 150 pupils – exactly matches the Standard 1 intake; so attendance at the pre-school unit is a virtual pre-requisite for Standard 1 entry. Few non-graduates, even if they have attended other pre-school programmes, gain entry to Standard 1 at Kazi.

Moreover, and of crucial importance, the pre-school unit charges fees. These amount to Ksh 1,000 (about $US 18) per month: modest in comparison with the fees charged at private primary schools, but high enough to exclude children from most low-income families. In effect the two year pre-school programme acts as an economic filter, giving access to eight years of fee-free, high-quality primary education to children coming mainly from relatively privileged, well-educated families.

It is evident, then, that at both Starlight and Kazi, the two highest-performing schools in our sample, there are barriers restricting access, although the structures are different. At Starlight the barrier is direct and plainly visible: the school charges fees which are beyond the reach of most parents. At Kazi, however, the barriers are less apparent. While there are no formal fees, entrants to Standard 1 are nevertheless required to have completed a well-organised pre-school programme, for which fees are charged.

Furthermore transfers from other schools – particularly into the upper standards – are actively discouraged.

Starlight and Kazi are not the only schools in our sample which perform well in the KCPE. The cluster of schools in the top-right corner of Figures 5.1 and 5.2 (high-status families, high-achieving schools) also includes Kisasa and St Thomas. However in striking contrast to Starlight and Kazi, neither of these schools is a popular choice with parents: in fact, both have experienced falling rolls in recent years.

Kisasa is something of a special case. As we have seen, Kisasa was originally a school for Europeans only, but at Independence became, along with similar schools, a 'high-cost' school: multiracial, but charging higher fees than regular schools. The economic barrier to access disappeared with the abolition of formal school fees in 2003, but it seems the old social and cultural barriers are still largely intact. Kisasa still retains something of its image as a school for the elite, apparent in such visible manifestations as the Latin motto over the oldest teaching block, the wide playing areas, and the extensive library.

St Thomas has also been losing pupils, at an even faster rate than Kisasa – despite buildings and a physical environment superior to any we saw at the other schools visited. Judged from its position in Figures 5.1 and 5.2, St Thomas is a successful school: only Starlight and Kazi scored higher in the 2006 KCPE. However St Thomas is a private school, so this comparison is not really meaningful. St Thomas competes for recruits in a relatively restricted pool: those whose parents can afford to pay private-school fees. As we saw in Chapter 2, when compared with other private schools in Nyeri District, St Thomas' KCPE record is unimpressive. In the 2006 examination it ranked 68th among 102 private schools – well below the median point – so it is not surprising that it has been losing pupils to other private schools with higher rankings.

The five schools further down the trend line in Figures 5.1 and 5.2 are all public-sector schools. Moreover in contrast to the schools in the top-right corner they are all open-access: barriers to entry, economic or sociocultural, are low or nonexistent. Nafasi school, as we saw in Chapter 4, actively welcomes recruits from deprived backgrounds.

Given the realities of the Kenya labour market, however, access to primary education has of itself limited meaning, unless it in turn gives access to effective secondary education, and ultimately to opportunities to earn a decent living. In writing their autobiographies, pupils in all schools discussed their future education and career prospects very frequently – perhaps more frequently than any other concern. Many showed keen awareness of the importance of the coming KCPE, and of its consequences:

> At the end of the year I will sit the KCPE, the examination which will decide whether I will become an important person
>
> Boy, 15

The wide spread in KCPE mean scores among schools must give concern that the schools towards the bottom end of the trend lines will prove much less successful than those near

the top in promoting access for their graduates to good-quality secondary education. It would be unfortunate, to say the least, if pupils from the restricted-access primary schools pre-empted most of the places at the more-desirable secondary schools, at the expense of those from the open-access schools. Over time the consequence of such a process would be the establishment of a deeply-stratified education system, with socioeconomic privilege being reproduced and reinforced from generation to generation, in the manner represented in Figure 5.3.

In the final section of this chapter we turn our attention to the role of the private schools in this stratification process.

5.4 FPE, stratification, and the private primary schools

We saw in Chapter 4 that at Tangazo and Majani, the two sample schools where FPE had the most impact, the majority of the new recruits who entered Standard 4 in 2003 came from private schools. At Tangazo, private-school transferees outnumbered public-school transferees by 10 to 3; while at Majani the ratio was 13 to 4 (Tables 4.1 and 4.2).

However the schools these transferees came from were not high-cost, high-quality private schools such as Starlight Academy, patronized by more-privileged families. Rather they were 'private schools for the poor', usually registered with the Ministry of Gender and Social Services, and charging fees lower than the 'parental contributions' levied by the public schools before 2003. Most if not all of these transferees were 'economic migrants': they moved to the public schools because with the abolition of the cost-sharing charges and the implementation of FPE, the public schools were now cheaper. In the perception of the pupils who wrote about them in their autobiographies, these private schools were of lower quality then the public schools they transferred to.

Systematic data are not available, but the informal evidence suggests strongly that the net flow was quickly reversed: 'academic migrants' moving from public to high-cost private schools in search of higher-quality education soon outnumbered 'economic migrants' moving from low-cost private schools to public schools. It may be remembered from the previous chapter that several 'academic migrants' from public schools to the private Starlight Academy wrote in their autobiographies that they had moved because of deteriorating conditions after the implementation of FPE: overcrowding, teacher shortages and the like.

Figure 5.4 Nairobi City Primary Schools: Mean KCPE Scores, 2006

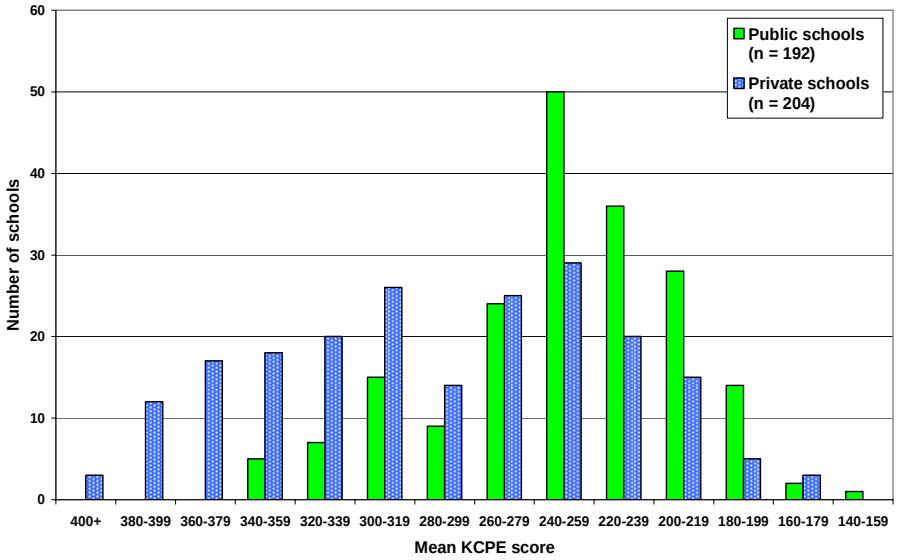
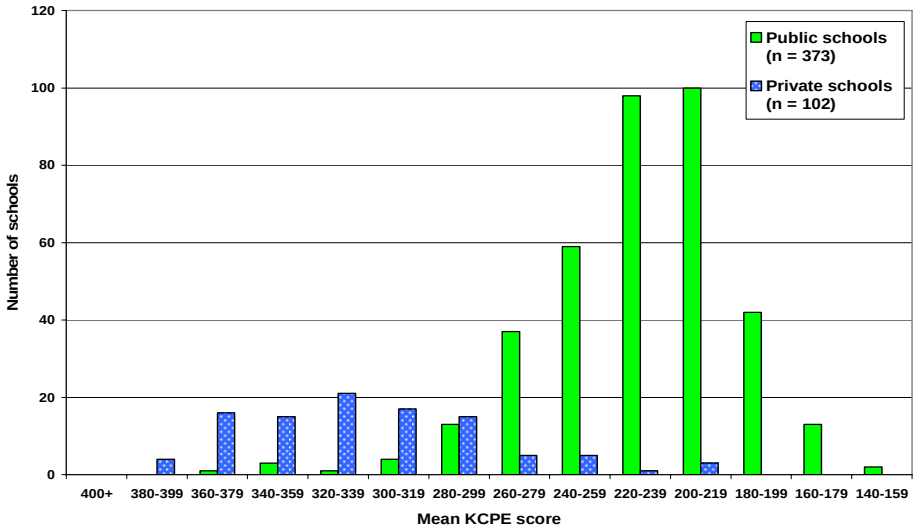


Figure 5.5 Nyeri District Primary Schools: Mean KCPE Scores, 2006



In both Nairobi and Nyeri, the number of private schools offering candidates for the KCPE has burgeoned in recent years. In Nairobi they now (2006) outnumber public schools, by 204 to 192. In Nyeri they still make up only a small minority (102 compared with 373 public schools), but numbers are increasing rapidly. In 2006, fifteen private schools offered KCPE candidates for the first time: a 17% increase in a single year.

The main reason why many private schools are so popular is evident from Figures 5.4 and 5.5. In both localities (but especially in Nyeri) they out-perform the public schools in the Kenya Certificate of Primary Education (KCPE) by a substantial margin. In the 2006 KCPE league tables, private schools took 45 of the 50 top places in Nairobi. In Nyeri,

despite the fact that private schools are relatively fewer in number, the proportion was exactly the same: 45 out of 50.

Why these performance differences are so massive is far from clear: further investigation is needed. During fieldwork a few lessons were observed in each of the schools visited (usually between two and four, depending on the time available). From such limited data generalization is of course impossible, but there was little evidence to suggest that teaching at the two private schools was markedly more effective than at the seven public schools, in terms of either subject content or pedagogy.

Whatever the reasons, the consequences for secondary school access are a major cause for concern. At present, KCPE candidates from the private schools compete on equal terms with public-school candidates for public secondary school places. We saw in Chapter 4 that at the two private primary schools we visited, Standard 8 pupils aspire to enter high- achieving public secondary schools – especially the national-catchment schools - rather than private secondary schools. In writing about their future plans, the eleven pupils at Starlight Academy who nominated a secondary school all chose a national-catchment public school. At St Thomas the pattern was similar: all six choices were for public secondary schools; of which four were for national-catchment schools, two for provincial-catchment schools. There was no mention of a private secondary school in any autobiography.

If current trends continue to strengthen, there is a danger that graduates from the private primary schools will come to dominate intakes to the high-achieving public secondary schools – especially the highly-selective national-catchment schools. These schools in turn tend to dominate access to the most prestigious courses at the public universities, and hence to the desirable career opportunities they lead to. The consequence might well be a new form of educational separation, in which pupils whose parents can afford to pay for private education at the primary level gain privileged access to public education at the secondary and tertiary levels, and subsequently to the job market.

It may be remembered from Chapter 2 that Mugunda, one of the two rural schools included in our Nyeri district sample, gained a national reputation for examination performance in the early 1960s, and was conspicuously successful in gaining access to national-catchment secondary schools for its graduates. In consequence, substantial numbers of Mugunda alumni are now members of Kenya's professional and economic elite. Forty years later competition for such opportunities is of course much more severe, but it would indeed be unfortunate if the chances of pupils now attending Mugunda and the many other schools like it were to reduced still further by increasing competition from pupils whose parents can afford to pay for their primary education.

The data to be collected during the second phase of this study will, it is hoped, help throw light on this most important issue.

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Annex 1 Questionnaire/Interview Schedule

Index No _____

Name in full:_____ □ Boy □ Girl

Father's name:_____ Your age:_____ Standard_____

School:_____Home village:_____Location:_____

1. What kinds of work does your father do? Write down <u>all</u> the kinds of work your father does to earn money, and say where he works. (If your father is not alive, describe the work done by the person who looks after you (your *guardian*), and say who that person is)

_____
_____
_____

2. Has your father (or guardian) ever done any other kinds of work? □ Yes □ No

<u>If Yes</u>: Describe clearly the other work he has done, and say where he worked

_____
_____

3. Does your father (or guardian) own any land? □ Yes □ No

<u>If Yes</u>: (a) About how many acres does he own? _____

(b) Who works on this land?_____

4. Did your <u>father</u> (or guardian) ever go to school? □Yes □ No □ I don't know

<u>If Yes</u>: How long was your father (or guardian) at school?
- □ He went to primary school for a few years
- □ He completed primary school
- □ He went to secondary school or teachers' college
- □ He went to university
- □ I don't know how long he was at school

4. Did your <u>mother</u> ever go to school? □Yes □No □ I don't know if my mother went to school

<u>If Yes</u>: How long was your mother at school?
- □ She went to primary school for a few years
- □ She completed primary school
- □ She went to secondary school or teachers' college
- □ She went to university
- □ I don't know how long my mother was at school

5. Do you have any older brothers or sisters of the same father and mother as yourself?
□Yes □No

If Yes: For each older brother or sister of the same mother and father, say how much schooling he or she had (if he or she did not go to school, write 'none') and say what work he or she is doing now (if he or she is still at school, write 'still at school')

	Brother or sister?	How much schooling he/she had	The work he/she is doing now
1			
2			
3			
4			
5			

6, How many younger brothers and sisters of the same father and mother do you have? _____

7. Do you have any older brothers or sisters of the same father but a different mother as yourself?
□Yes □No

If Yes: For each older brother or sister with the same father but a different mother, say how much schooling he or she had (if he or she did not go to school, write 'none') and say what work he or she is doing now (if he or she is still at school, write 'still at school')

	Brother or sister?	How much schooling he/she had	The work he/she is doing now
1			
2			
3			
4			

8 How many younger brothers and sisters of the same father but different mother do you have? _____

9. Please tell us about your time at school since you started in Standard 1 by filling in the table below. Begin by telling us the year you started in Standard 1, the name of the school you attended, and the district where that school is located. Then give the same information for each following year up to the present. If you were out of school for one or more years, please write 'no schooling' in the row for that year or years. The last row in your table should be for the year 2007!

Year	Standard	Name of School	District