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**The Introduction of Academy Schools to England's Education**

We study what has become a high profile example of education policy that highlights the scope to improve outcomes from changing school types – the introduction of academy schools to the English secondary school sector. Our results indicate that, in some settings, academy conversion generated a significant improvement in the quality of pupil intake and generated significant improvements in pupil performance for those who attended schools treated by academy conversion. There is evidence of heterogeneity in the estimated performance effects, as improvements only occur for schools experiencing the largest increase in their school autonomy relative to their predecessor state. Analysis of mechanisms points to changes in headteachers and management structure, and to curriculum change, as key factors underpinning the observed improvements in educational outcomes.