



BRIEFING PAPER

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Grammar School Statistics

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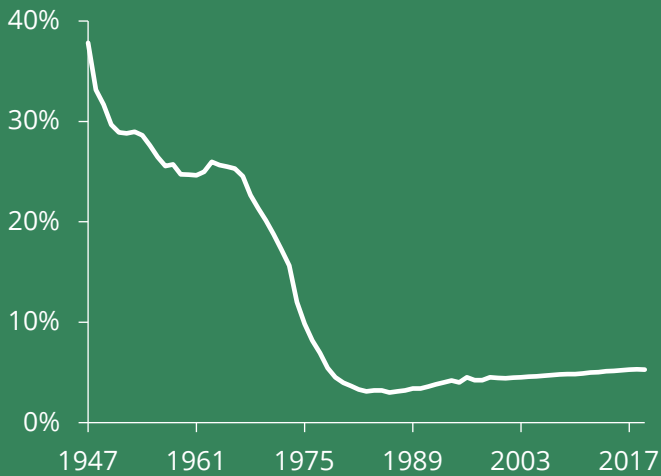
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GRAMMAR SCHOOLS IN ENGLAND

PROPORTION OF GRAMMAR PUPILS



Notes: England and Wales to 1969, England only thereafter

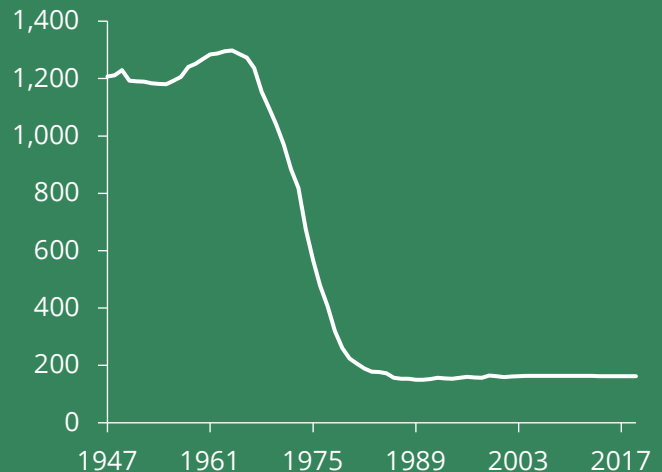
The number of state grammar schools peaked at almost 1,300 in the mid 1960's.

At this time around a quarter of all pupils in state secondaries attended grammars.

The number of grammars started falling soon after. The fastest period of decline was the 1970s; between 1971 and 1978 650 grammar schools closed.

Grammars are unevenly distributed, with 75% of LEA's having no grammar schools.

NUMBER OF GRAMMAR SCHOOLS



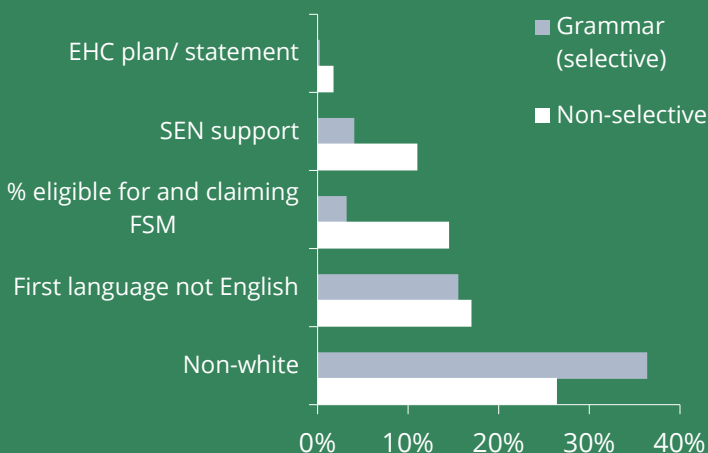
Notes: England and Wales to 1969, England only thereafter

GCSE attainment at grammars is, on average much better than in non-selective schools.

However, differences in pupil intakes means that headline results may not give us the most meaningful comparisons.

As well as differences in prior attainment, pupils in grammar schools are much less likely to have special education needs or be eligible for free school meals compared to pupils in non-selective schools. Grammar schools also have a higher proportion of non-white pupils.

PUPIL CHARACTERISTICS



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1. Background

1.1 What are grammar schools?

Grammar schools select all or most of their pupils based on examination of their academic ability, usually at age 11.¹

Section 104 of the *School Standards and Framework Act 1998* allowed for the designation of maintained schools as grammar schools in cases where the Secretary of State was satisfied that a school had selective admission arrangements at the beginning of the 1997-98 school year.

Designated grammar schools are permitted to continue to select pupils on the basis of their academic ability. However, selection by ability is prohibited for all other local authority maintained schools, other than for banding and selection to sixth forms.²

1.2 The tripartite system

The *Education Act 1944* brought about major changes to the education system in England and Wales. Among these were the extension of free education to all state secondary schools and introduction of the **tripartite system** at secondary levels; grammar, technical and secondary modern.

A key element of the tripartite system introduced by the 1944 Act was the 11-plus examination which determined which type of school a pupil would attend –the higher scoring pupils going to the more academic grammar schools.

Grammar schools had existed long before the Act, but their status was similar to that of a current independent school. State support was extended to the 'new' grammar schools in the early 20th century, which effectively created a class of maintained grammar schools. Alongside these were direct grant grammar schools which received public funding to pay the fees of pupils from state primary schools that had to make up at least 25% of their places. Very few of these schools were entirely free.³

The comprehensive school emerged as an experiment in a few areas in the early 1950s. This alternative to the tripartite system increased modestly at first to just over 100 schools in 1959.

More rapid expansion in the number of comprehensives and a very clear decline in the number of grammar schools came from 1965 when circular 10/65 was issued by the Ministry of Education encouraging local education authorities to move to non-selective education.

Further background information is available in the policy Library briefing paper [Grammar schools in England](#).

In the mid-1970s **direct-grant grammar schools** were given the option of becoming maintained comprehensives or losing their grant and becoming 'full' independents.

Those that did not join the state sector had their fees phased out and were reclassified as independents in 1980.

¹ [Types of school](#), DfE website, last updated 2 Sept 2016

² [Education and Inspections Act 2006](#), section 39(1) and [School Standards and Framework Act 1998](#), section 99(2).

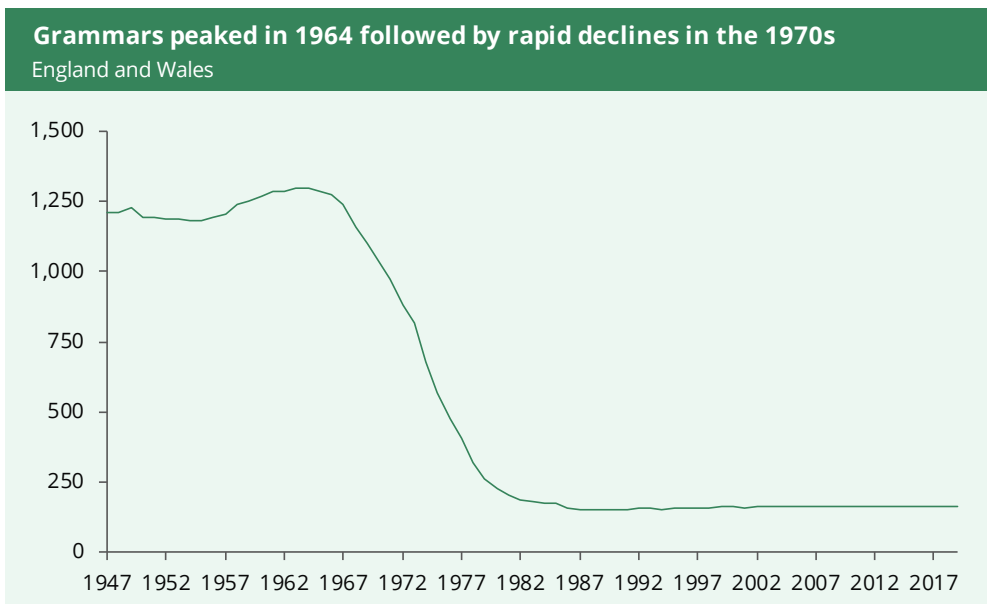
³ *Education 1900-1950 The report of the Ministry of Education and the statistics of public education for England and Wales for the year 1950*

2. National trends in grammar schools since 1947

This [excel file](#) lists the current 163 grammar schools in England by location.

The number of grammar schools peaked at 1,298 in 1964. The absolute number of pupils in state grammar schools also peaked in 1964 (726,000 pupils).⁴ However, the proportion of secondary school pupils in grammars was highest in 1947 at just under 38%.

The most likely explanation for this is that most grammars existed already and could be filled soon after the 1944 Act came into force. Expansion of the rest of the publicly funded secondary sector (effectively secondary moderns at that time) took longer.



Notes: England and Wales to 1969, England only thereafter. These figures do not include direct-grant grammar schools which continued outside the maintained sector after the 1944 Act.

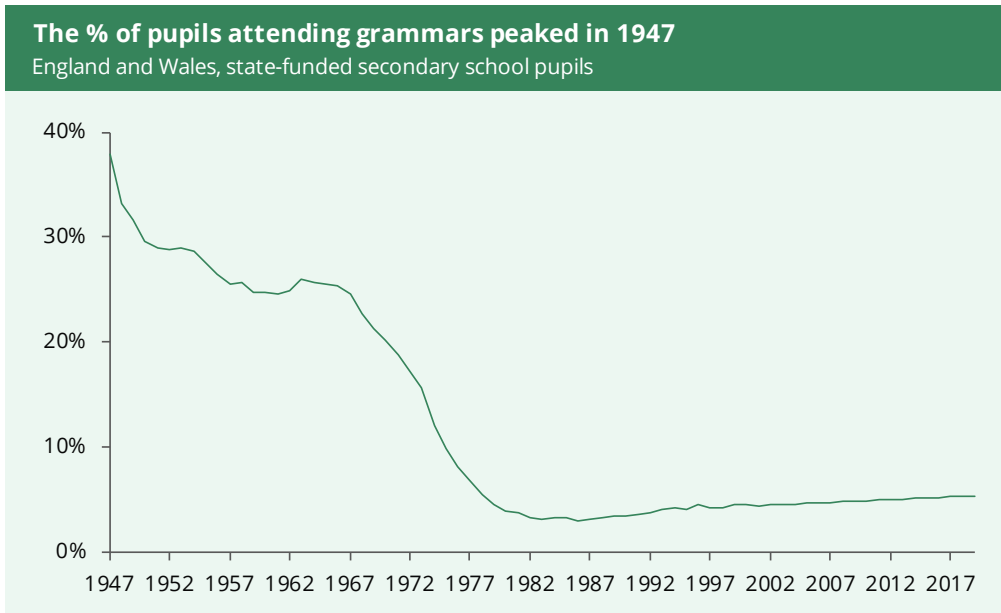
Sources: Statistics of education schools in England, various years; [Schools, pupils and their characteristics](#): January 2019 (and earlier), DfE

The fastest period of decline in both the number of grammar schools and the proportion of pupils attending grammars was the 1970s. Between 1971 and 1978 650 grammar schools closed. An average of more than 90 per year. The last grammar school in Wales closed in 1988. There was a modest increase in the number of grammar schools in England in the early to mid-1990s. Their number remained at 164 until 2013. The merger of two grammars in Kent at the start of 2013/14⁵ reduced it to 163; the first change for a decade.

In 1965 the Ministry of Education issued circular 10/65 which encouraged local authorities to move to non-selective education. The number of grammars nearly halved in the following decade.

⁴ England and Wales. B.R. Mitchell, *British Historical Statistics*, Table XV.1

⁵ Chatham House Grammar School for Boys and Clarendon House Grammar School



Notes: England and Wales to 1969, England only thereafter. These figures do not include direct-grant grammar schools which continued outside the maintained sector after the 1944 Act.

Sources: Statistics of education schools in England, various years; [Schools, pupils and their characteristics](#): January 2019 (and earlier), DfE

Under the *School Standards and Framework Act 1998* no new maintained grammar school can be opened and existing schools cannot introduce new selection by ability.⁶ However, there has been a very gradual but steady increase in the number and proportion of pupils at existing grammar schools since the Act. This is because the average size of grammars has increased.

In January 2019, 66% of grammars were full or had more pupils than their stated capacity⁷, compared to 15% of all state-funded secondary schools.⁸

The Chancellor's [Autumn Statement](#) on 23 November 2016 included £50m in funding for the expansion of existing grammar schools, each year from 2017-18 to 2020-21.⁹

Changes to the [School Admissions Code](#) made in 2012, and retained in the updated December 2014 version, made it easier for schools, including grammar schools, to expand their numbers.

⁶ [Education and Inspections Act 2006](#), section 39 and [School Standards and Framework Act 1998](#), sections 99 and 104. Also [HL Deb 16 February 2012 cWA184-5](#)

⁷ [Get Information About Schools](#), DfE (filtered for state-funded secondary schools with selective admissions policies) [accessed 12 Dec 2019]

⁸ [School capacity](#): academic year 2017 to 2018, DfE (Table A3)

⁹ [Autumn Statement 2016](#), HM Treasury, p44

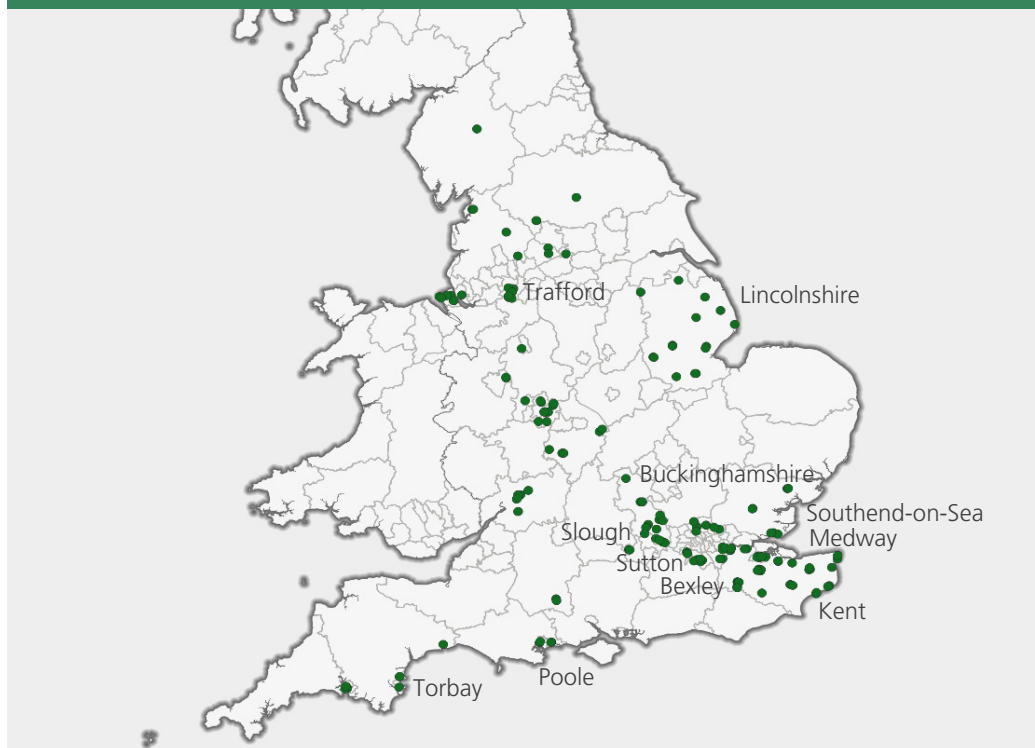
3. Snapshot of grammar schools in 2019

3.1 Sub-national statistics

The geographic distribution of the 163 grammars in England is very uneven. At a regional level, in 2019 the South East has the highest proportion of state secondary pupils attending grammar schools with 13%, followed by the South West with 7%. The North East is the only region with no grammar schools.¹⁰

In January 2019, the Department for Education classified 11 Local Education Authorities (LEAs) out of 151 with state-funded secondary schools, as having a “highly selective” system (where 25% or more of state-funded secondary school places are in state-funded selective schools).¹¹ A further 26 have one or more grammar schools in their local area, while 114 (75% of LEAs) have none.

Around 60% of grammars are in just 11 LEAs
England, January 2019



Note: In April 2019 there were changes in the structure of councils in Dorset. A new local authority "Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole" was created. In the most recently available data (prior to these changes) Poole was the only authority in that area defined as highly selective by the DfE.

Sources: [Key Stage 4 performance \(revised\)](#): 2018, DfE (Table 2b); [Get Information About Schools](#), DfE [accessed December 2019]

¹⁰ [Schools pupils and their characteristics](#): January 2019, DfE

¹¹ [Key Stage 4 performance \(revised\)](#): 2018, DfE (Table 2b). There are now 152 LEAs in England.

3.2 Pupil characteristics

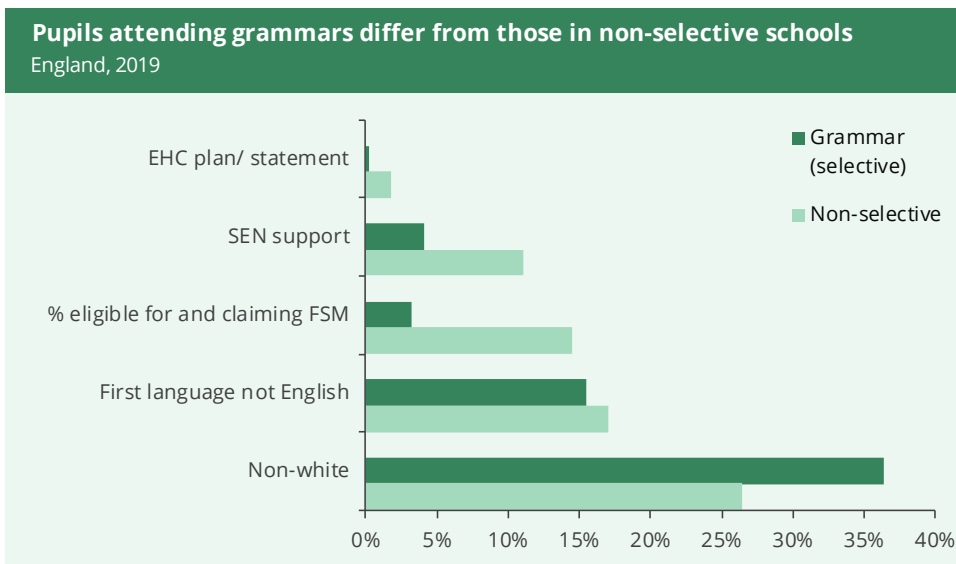
It is not possible to make strictly like for like comparisons with grammar pupil characteristics and national averages. This is because as outlined above grammars are not distributed evenly around the country. This means that it is possible differences could be explained by other 'local factors'. A more sophisticated analysis would look at the areas that these schools draw their population from and use this as a comparator.

The DfE publishes pupil characteristics broken down by selective schools and non-selective schools, but does not differentiate between non-selective schools in highly selective areas and those in non-selective areas.

The analysis below compares average pupil characteristics in grammar schools with non-selective schools.¹² Due to the issues outlined above, readers should not give too much weight to small differences.

In 2019, pupils at grammar schools were much less likely than pupils at non-selective schools to have Education Health and Care (EHC) Plans or Statements (0.3% compared to 1.7%), have Special Educational Needs (SEN) support (4% compared to 11%) or be eligible for free school meals (3% compared to 15%).

Grammar schools had a higher than average proportion of non-white pupils (36% compared to 26%) while there was relatively little difference in English as a first language by school type (16% compared to 17%).



Notes: Schools with no published admissions policy are excluded

Sources: [Special Educational Needs in England: January 2019, DfE \(underlying data\)](#); [Schools pupils and their characteristics: January 2019, DfE \(underlying data\)](#)

¹² Schools with no published admissions policy are excluded.

4. GCSE Attainment

The key GCSE attainment measures examined below (Attainment 8, Progress 8, and proportion of pupils achieving 9-5 grades in English and Maths) show that results for grammar schools are much better, on average, than those for non-selective schools.¹³

The headline GCSE attainment measures show that the difference in attainment is greatest between grammar schools and non-selective schools in highly selective areas.¹⁴

The difference in attainment is largest between grammar schools and non-selective schools in highly selective areas
Mainstream schools in England, 2019

	Average Attainment 8 score	Average Progress 8 score	% achieving a 9-5 pass in English and maths
Grammar schools	71.1	0.56	92.9
State-funded secondary schools	47.4	0.01	44.1
Non-selective schools in selective or non-selective areas	46.6	0.00	42.6
Non-selective schools in highly selective areas	42.3	-0.13	32.0

Source: [Revised GCSE and equivalent results in England: 2018 \(Table 2b and 4b\)](#)

However, pupil intake differs between grammar and non-selective schools, both in terms of background characteristics (such as free school meal eligibility which was discussed in the previous section) and prior attainment.

Unsurprisingly, pupils at grammar schools were much less likely to have low prior attainment when starting secondary school (0.1% in 2018 compared to the 12.7% national average) and much more likely to have high prior attainment (93.5% in 2018 compared to the 42.6% national average).¹⁵ This means that headline results may not give us the most meaningful comparisons, because these pupils with high prior attainment may have achieved better than average attainment at any school type they attended.

It is not possible to control for all pupil intake characteristics; but the table below shows that the attainment gap between grammar and non-selective schools narrows once headline attainment measures are broken down by prior attainment band.

It is also important to note that there is still scope for substantial variation within the 'high prior attainment group' between different school types. Given that grammars select on ability, it is likely that these

Attainment 8 is an average score based on a pupil's best eight grades in a group of GCSEs.

Progress 8 aims to capture the progress a pupil makes from the end of primary school to the end of secondary school.

For example, a school with a Progress 8 score of -0.25 has pupils that on average achieved a quarter of a grade less than other pupils with similar starting points.

Further information about calculating Attainment 8 and Progress 8 can be found [here](#).

¹³ [Revised GCSE and equivalent results in England: 2018, DfE](#) (Table 2b)

¹⁴ [Revised GCSE and equivalent results in England: 2018, DfE](#) (Table 2b)

¹⁵ [Revised GCSE and equivalent results in England: 2018, DfE](#) (Table 4b)

pupils have higher levels of attainment, when finely graded, than pupils in the 'high prior attainment group' at non-selective schools.

Grammar schools' GCSE results are much better on average than non-selective schools

Mainstream schools in England, 2018

	Average Attainment 8 score	Average Progress 8 score	% achieving a 9-5 pass in English and maths
<i>Grammar schools</i>			
Low prior attainment	41.9	1.45	36.4
Medium prior attainment	55.4	0.98	64.4
High prior attainment	72.0	0.54	94.8
All	71.1	0.56	92.9
<i>Non-selective schools in highly selective areas</i>			
Low prior attainment	25.2	-0.04	2.4
Medium prior attainment	40.0	-0.08	21.0
High prior attainment	55.5	-0.28	66.4
All	42.3	-0.13	32.0
<i>Other non-selective schools</i>			
Low prior attainment	25.4	0.01	2.7
Medium prior attainment	41.0	0.01	24.8
High prior attainment	60.3	-0.02	76.4
All	46.6	0.00	42.6
<i>State-funded secondary schools</i>			
Low prior attainment	25.4	0.00	2.7
Medium prior attainment	41.0	0.00	24.7
High prior attainment	61.2	0.02	77.7
All	47.4	0.01	44.1

Notes: The small number of pupils with low prior attainment at grammars means that these figures should be treated with caution. "Other" non-selective schools are non-selective schools in selective or non-selective areas.

Source: [Revised GCSE and equivalent results in England: 2018, DfE \(Table 2b and 4b\)](#)

Grammar school pupil intakes are more likely to have higher prior attainment

Mainstream schools in England, 2018, %

	Low	Medium	High
Grammar schools	0.1	6.5	93.5
Non-selective schools in highly selective areas	16.0	53.5	30.5
Other non-selective schools	13.1	45.9	41.0
State-funded secondary schools	12.7	44.7	42.6

Notes: The small number of pupils with low prior attainment at grammars means that these figures should be treated with caution. "Other" non-selective schools are non-selective schools in selective or non-selective areas.

Source: [Revised GCSE and equivalent results in England: 2018, DfE \(Table 4b\)](#)

5. Research about grammar schools

There is a substantial body of research on grammar schools. Both supporters and opponents of new grammar schools tend to focus on social mobility, as well as educational attainment, pupil intake and the impact of grammars on other local schools and pupils.

In December 2016, the Parliamentary Office of Science and Technology published a literature review about the [Academic Evidence on Selective Secondary Education](#). The main findings of the review were:

- Children who are eligible for Free School Meals (FSM) are much less likely to attend a grammar school than those that are not. This is the case even after controlling for attainment. Research suggests that this is because children from poorer backgrounds have less access to resources, such as high-quality primary school education and private tuition, which help children to perform well at school and prepare for entrance exams.
- After controlling for prior attainment, GCSE attainment is on average higher for pupils attending grammar schools than for pupils who attend other types of school. This difference was found to be statistically significant but “modest”.¹⁶
- After controlling for prior attainment, GCSE attainment is on average lower for pupils attending non-grammar schools in selective areas, compared to pupils in non-selective areas. This difference was found to be “statistically significant but very modest”.¹⁷
- Differences in attainment between pupils attending grammar school and those attending non-grammar schools in selective areas may be due in part to the quality of teaching and peer effects (i.e., the impact of average peer ability on own ability).
- One study looked at social mobility using data from the 1958 National Child Development Study, a cohort which would have attended secondary school in the 1970s. The study found that the selective education system as a whole did not improve social mobility for children who were born into any particular income bracket or social class.
- Available evidence from England and international comparisons using PISA data¹⁸ suggests that across OECD countries, selective education systems widen educational inequality, and do not increase performance overall.

The Education Select committee report [Evidence check: Grammar schools](#), also summarises oral evidence from a session on 8 November

¹⁶ [Academic Evidence on Selective Secondary Education](#), POST Brief paper 0022, December 2016, p9

¹⁷ [Academic Evidence on Selective Secondary Education](#), POST Brief paper 0022, December 2016, p10

¹⁸ [PISA](#) is a triennial international survey which aims to evaluate education systems in the OECD by testing the knowledge of 15-year-old students.

2016 about “the cases for and against grammar schools, and their effects on academic attainment, social mobility, and the education system as a whole”.¹⁹

Durham University research

Durham University researchers [published findings](#) in December 2016, using the 2015 school cohort, stating that “results from grammar schools are no better than expected” once social stratification (such as poverty, ethnicity, language, special educational needs) is taken into account.²⁰

Institute of Education

Similarly, in May 2018, the Institute of Education (IoE) published [a study](#) which found that grammar school pupils “do not gain any advantage over children who do not attend a grammar school by age 14.” The IoE assessed a range of social and emotional outcomes, including young people’s engagement and well-being at school, their aspirations for the future, in addition to educational attainment levels, to determine the benefits of attending a grammar school.²¹

Education Policy Institute

In September 2016, the Education Policy Institute published a report on the [impact of grammar schools on social mobility](#) which stated that, among other findings:

- Once prior attainment and pupil background is taken into consideration, there is no overall attainment impact of grammar schools.
- Pupils who are eligible for free school meals are under-represented in grammar schools.
- Grammar schools do not have a significant positive impact on social mobility.
- In the most selective areas, the positive effect of attending a grammar school is 2.3 GCSE grades spread over 8 subjects (0.3 grades per subject). Within those highly selective areas, that gain falls to 0.8 of a grade overall, (in areas where grammar school places outnumber the proportion of high attaining pupils). In the most selective areas there is a small negative effect of not attending grammar schools – an average of 0.6 grades lower per pupil across all GCSE subjects. But that impact is greater for pupils eligible for free school meals who do not attend grammar schools, they achieve 1.2 grades lower on average across all GCSE subjects.
- The above finding indicated that “an expansion of grammar schools in areas which already have a large number of selective schools could lead to lower gains for grammar school pupils and

¹⁹ Education Committee, [Evidence Check: Grammar schools](#), 8 February 2017, HC 780-4 2016-17, para 6

²⁰ [Grammar schools in England : a new approach to analysing their intakes and outcomes](#), Durham University, 5 December 2016

²¹ [Government’s grammar school funding won’t improve children’s outcomes, say experts](#), Institute of Education, 23 May 2018

small attainment losses for those not attending selective schools – losses which will be greatest amongst poor children”.²²

Sutton Trust

In December 2016, the Sutton Trust [published research](#) which stated that, among other findings:

- The relatively low proportion of grammar pupils eligible for FSM cannot be explained by the location of the schools or by differences in the prior attainment of disadvantaged pupils.
- At the other end of the scale, grammar schools reportedly take a relatively large proportion of their pupils from independent primary schools. In 2016 the Sutton Trust estimated this rate at around 11%, nearly double the proportion of pupils aged 10 who attended independent schools that year.²³ However, this has declined from an estimated rate of 13% in 2013.²⁴

Higher Education Policy Institute

In January 2019, the Higher Education Policy Institute (HEPI) published a paper: [The Impact of Selective Secondary Education on Progression to Higher Education](#).

In summary, this paper argued that a focus on pupils eligible for free school meals when examining the impact of grammar schools on disadvantaged pupils is too narrow. It estimated that 45% of grammar school pupils come from below median income families.²⁵ It also found that areas with grammar schools send a higher proportion of pupils to highly-selective universities. This led the author to conclude that grammar schools are positive for social mobility.

However, in January 2020, HEPI published a [collection of essays](#) by a selection of authors in response to the 2019 paper. This response questioned the methods and data used, and therefore the conclusion drawn. The authors main critiques were:

- By the DfE’s own admission²⁶, the DfE income data used in the [2019 paper](#) is incomplete, particularly for higher income families. The authors argue this makes it appear that a larger proportion of grammar school pupils are from below median income families. Research using a composite measure estimate this figure at less than half the proportion stated in the [2019 paper](#).²⁷
- There are differences between areas with selective education systems and those with comprehensive systems. This means that comparisons in university admission rates need to control for other factors (such as income).

²² [Grammar schools and social mobility](#), Education Policy Institute, September 2016

²³ [Schools pupils and their characteristics: 2016](#) DfE, (Table 1c and 1a)

²⁴ [Entry into Grammar Schools for disadvantaged pupils in England](#), Sutton Trust, November 2013, p5

²⁵ [The Impact of Selective Secondary Education on Progression to Higher Education](#), HEPI, January 2019, p17

²⁶ [Analysing Family Circumstances Technical Consultation Document](#): 2017, DfE

²⁷ [Social Mobility and Higher Education](#), HEPI, Jan 2020, p17

- The [2019 paper](#) did not take into account the aggregate impact on social mobility (ie. it did not take into account pupils who do not attend grammar schools).

Education Datalab briefing

In September 2016, Education Datalab published a [briefing note on grammar schools](#) that drew on the performance of four local authorities with some of the largest numbers of grammar schools: Kent, Medway, Buckinghamshire and Lincolnshire.

The analysis found that:

- Academic selection creates winners and losers: children at grammar schools make more progress than they otherwise would, whereas children at non-selective schools in selective areas make less progress than they otherwise would;
- Poor children are less likely to get in to grammar schools, and this would be very difficult to change without loosening requirements to such an extent that the schools might no longer be seen as selective;
- Academic selection increases inequalities in outcomes

Further [research](#) undertaken by *Education Datalab*, examined social inequalities in selective and non-selective areas. It showed that staffing was more stable in grammar schools than in non-selective schools and had higher proportions of qualified and experienced teachers.

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