

Research Briefing

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Grammar schools in England



Summary

- 1 Current position
- 2 Proposals for new and expanded grammar schools 2016-17
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Summary

Current position

Grammar schools select all or most of their pupils based on examination of their academic ability, usually at age 11. There is a general prohibition against state funded schools selecting pupils based on academic ability. Grammar schools that have had selective admissions arrangements in place since the 1997/98 school year are an exception to this and are permitted to continue to select by ability.

The general prohibition against academic selection in state schools prevents the establishment of any new grammar schools. However, existing grammar schools can expand, providing that any expansion onto a new site is a change to an existing school and not a new school. In October 2015, the then Education Secretary approved a proposal from the Weald of Kent Grammar School in Tonbridge to open a satellite site in Sevenoaks.

Proposals for reform

On 9 September 2016, then Prime Minister Theresa May announced the Government's intention to [remove the prohibition on the creation of new grammar schools](#) and to give the 'green light' to the expansion of existing grammars. A consultation on the proposals, [Schools that work for everyone](#), was subsequently published in September 2016 and ran until December 2016.

The Conservative manifesto for the 2017 General Election said they intended to lift the ban on new selective schools, subject to conditions. Following the loss of the Conservative majority at the election, the proposals did not appear in the [Queen's Speech](#) in June 2017. The Government subsequently confirmed the existing prohibition would remain in place.

A [response to the Schools that work for everyone consultation](#) was published in May 2018, alongside a new [Memorandum of Understanding](#) between the Department for Education and the Grammar School Heads Association, which focused on improving access to grammar schools for disadvantaged children.

The Chancellor's [Autumn Statement](#) on 23 November 2016 announced £200m in funding for the expansion of existing grammar schools, the first £50m of which was provided in 2018-19 through the new [Selective School Expansion Fund](#).

In November 2022 the current Education Secretary, [Gillian Keegan](#), said her [attention was on comprehensive education](#).

Number of grammar schools

[In January 2022, around 188,000 pupils attended 163 grammar schools](#) (5.3% of state-funded secondary pupils). The geographic distribution of grammar schools in England is very uneven. Only 35 local authorities have any grammar schools and around 60% of grammars are located in just 11 local authorities.

Grammar school pupils

[Pupils at grammar schools were much less likely than pupils at non-selective schools to be eligible for free school meals](#) (around 6% compared to 21% in 2022). They were also much less likely to have special educational needs.

Grammar school attainment

Grammar schools select all or most of their pupils based on examination of their academic ability. This means it is not surprising that [GCSE attainment](#) measures such as [Attainment 8 \(PDF\)](#) are much higher, on average, for grammar schools (74.1 in 2022) than non-selective schools in both highly selective areas (44.2) and in non-highly selective areas (48.9). Highly selective areas are where 25% or more of state-funded secondary school places are in state-funded selective schools.

It is not possible to control for all pupil intake characteristics. However, [after adjusting for prior attainment \(at key stage 2\) the difference between grammars and non-selective schools narrows](#).

In 2022, the average Attainment 8 score of pupils with high prior attainment at grammar schools was 77.0, in non-selective schools in highly selective areas it was 62.6, and in non-selective schools in other areas it was 68.4.

1 Current position

1.1 Selection of pupils by ability

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](#) provided for the designation of maintained schools as grammar schools where the Secretary of State was satisfied that a school had selective admission arrangements at the beginning of the 1997-98 school year.

Selective admission arrangements are defined as arrangements that “make provision for all (or substantially all) of [a school’s] pupils to be selected by reference to general ability, with a view to admitting only pupils with high ability.”²

Grammar schools, and schools that have had unchanged partially selective admissions arrangements in place since the 1997-98 school year, are permitted to continue to select pupils based on their academic ability. Selection by ability is prohibited for all other local authority maintained schools, other than for banding and selection to sixth forms.³ Additionally, a maintained school may select based on aptitude⁴ if:

- it used such selection in 1997-98 and has continued to use it since then without significant changes;⁵
- it selects up to 10% of its intake on the basis of aptitude in its specialist area(s), provided that the admission arrangements do not involve any test of ability or any test designed to elicit the pupil’s aptitude for other subjects.⁶

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

² [School Standards and Framework Act 1998](#), section 104

³ [Education and Inspections Act 2006](#), section 39(1) and [School Standards and Framework Act 1998](#), section 99(2).

⁴ Aptitude is not defined in the [School Standards and Framework Act 1998](#). During the Committee Stage of the Bill, the then Schools Minister, Stephen Byers, gave the following distinction between ability and aptitude: “Ability is what a child has already achieved. Aptitude is the natural talent and interest that a child has in a specific subject in other words, the potential to develop a skill or talent. That is the distinction in the Bill. I am pleased to put that on record” ([School Standards and Framework Bill Deb 24 February 1998 c644](#)).

⁵ [School Standards and Framework Act 1998](#), section 100

⁶ *Ibid*, section 102. Paragraph 1.24 of the [School Admissions Code](#) (PDF) lists the subjects on which a school may select by aptitude.

Converter academies that were previously designated as grammar schools or had partially selective arrangements when in the local authority maintained sector can continue to be selective. Apart from these exceptions, under the Academies Act 2010 all academies must provide for children of different abilities (ie be ‘comprehensive’). This means selective independent schools wishing to become free schools cannot select by ability as free schools.⁷

1.2 Expansion of existing grammar schools

Increasing a school’s Published Admission Number

The general restriction on selection by ability for state funded schools means that no new grammar schools may be created.⁸ It is possible for existing grammar schools to expand.

Changes to the [School Admissions Code](#), made in 2012, and retained in the updated December 2014 and 2021 codes, made it easier for schools, including grammar schools, to expand their numbers without condition or the use of any oversubscription criteria.⁹ One of the changes enabled schools to increase their Published Admission Number (PAN) without the need for consultation.¹⁰ In answer to a parliamentary question on 14 June 2012, Lord Hill of Oareford, then Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Schools, explained how these changes related to grammar schools:

The existing legislation that governs the prohibition on the introduction of new selective schools remains in place. The only change that the Government have made since we came in is the ability of schools of all types to expand their number locally in response to parental demand, if they are popular schools, because we are keen to give parents more ability to get their children into local popular schools.¹¹

Expanding a school’s premises

On 28 January 2014, the [School Organisation \(Prescribed Alterations to Maintained Schools\) \(England\) Regulations 2013](#) came into force and [accompanying statutory guidance](#) was published by the Department for Education.¹² Under the regulations, governing bodies of all maintained schools can in some cases enlarge the school premises without the need for a

⁷ Combined effect of sections 1A(1)(c), 6(3) and 6(4) of the [Academies Act 2010](#).

⁸ [Education and Inspections Act 2006](#), section 39 and [School Standards and Framework Act 1998](#), sections 99 and 104. Also see [HL Deb 16 February 2012 cWA184-5](#)

⁹ Department for Education (DfE), [School Admissions Code](#), (PDF) December 2021, para 2.8.

¹⁰ Department for Education (DfE), [School Admissions Code](#), (PDF) December 2021, para 1.3.

¹¹ [HL Deb 14 Jun 2012 c1415](#)

¹² The [School Organisation \(Prescribed Alterations to Maintained Schools\) \(England\) Regulations 2013](#), SI 2013/3110

DfE, [Making ‘prescribed alterations’ to maintained schools](#), October 2018

statutory process. This applies to grammar schools as to other local authority maintained schools.¹³

Before making any changes, governing bodies must ensure a number of criteria are fulfilled, including that the admissions authority is content for the published admissions number (PAN) to be changed where this forms part of expansion plans.¹⁴ Expansions not requiring a physical enlargement to the premises of the school are not covered by the regulations. Such an increase in pupil numbers may be achieved solely by increasing the PAN in line with the School Admissions Code.¹⁵

In the case of community, foundation and voluntary schools, local authorities can also propose that a school's premises be enlarged by following a streamlined statutory process set out in regulations.¹⁶

Academies proposing to make a change that will have a “[significant](#)” impact on their premises need to seek approval from the local authority/Regional Schools Commissioner. Applications are either ‘fast track’ or ‘full business case’ according to the type of change being proposed.

Expanding onto an additional site

Creating new selective maintained schools and academies is prohibited by statute. Expansion of any existing academy onto a satellite site will only be approved if it is the same school and the academy trust has the financial resources to create the satellite site.¹⁷ Guidance published by the Department for Education provides a list of factors to be considered by the local authority/Regional Schools Commissioner when considering proposals to expand a maintained school onto a satellite site:

- The reasons for the expansion:
 - What is the rationale for this approach and this particular site?
- Admission and curriculum arrangements
 - How will the new site be used (e.g. which age groups/pupils will it serve)?
- Are any changes to admission arrangements necessary?
 - Will there be movement of pupils between sites?
- Governance and administration

¹³ DfE, [Making ‘prescribed alterations’ to maintained schools](#), p8

¹⁴ As above.

¹⁵ As above

¹⁶ As above, p9

¹⁷ DfE, [Making significant changes to an open academy](#), January 2022, p. 16

- How will whole school activities be managed?
 - Will staff be employed on contracts to work on both sites? How frequently will they do so?
 - What governance, leadership and management arrangements will be put in place to oversee the new site (e.g. will the new site be governed by the same governing body /academy trust board and the same school leadership team)?
- Physical characteristics of the school
 - How will facilities across the two sites be used (e.g. sharing of the facilities and resources available at the two sites, such as playing fields)?
 - Is the new site in an area that is easily accessible to the community that the current school serves?¹⁸

The purpose of considering these factors is to determine the level of integration between the two sites; the more integration, the more likely the change will be considered as an expansion. Where a local authority considers there is a need for a new school to address basic need for school places it must seek proposals to establish a free school under the [free school presumption](#).¹⁹

The same criteria are listed as being used by the Secretary of State when deciding whether to approve the expansion of academy schools onto satellite sites.²⁰

Ending selective arrangements at grammar schools

Sections 104 to 109 of the [School Standards and Framework Act 1998](#) make provision for parental ballots to determine whether particular grammar schools or groups of grammar schools should retain their selective admission arrangements.²¹ A ballot can only be held if at least 20% of eligible parents have signed a petition requesting a ballot. The detailed arrangements for the ballot are set out in regulations.²²

Governing bodies of local authority maintained grammar schools may also propose ending the selective admission arrangements at a grammar school by following a statutory process.²³ Information on the stages of the statutory process is provided in Department for Education guidance, [Making 'prescribed alterations' to maintained schools](#).

¹⁸ DfE, [Making 'prescribed alterations' to maintained schools](#), p9-10

¹⁹ DfE, [Establishing a new school: free school presumption](#), November 2019

²⁰ DfE, [Making significant changes to an open academy](#), January 2022, p16

²¹ [School Standards and Framework Act 1998](#), sections 104-109

²² The [Education \(Grammar School Ballots\) Regulations 1998](#), SI 1998/2876

²³ As above, p21

The procedure for ending selection at a selective academy will be found in the school's funding agreement (contract) with the Secretary of State for Education.

2 Proposals for new and expanded grammar schools 2016-17

2.1 Government proposals

September 2016 proposal to lift the ban on new grammar schools

On 9 September 2016 then-Prime Minister, Theresa May, confirmed the Government's intention to lift the long-standing ban on the [creation of entirely new grammar schools in England](#), and to “give the green light” to the expansion of existing grammar schools.²⁴

The Government consulted on proposals:

Requiring new or expanding grammars to take a proportion of pupils from lower income households, so that selective education is not reserved for those with the means to move into a catchment area or pay for tuition to pass the test; or

Requiring them to establish a new, high quality, non-selective free school. Requiring them to set up or sponsor a primary feeder school in an area with a high density of lower income households; or

Requiring them to sponsor a currently underperforming non-selective academy.²⁵

It was also proposing that existing non-selective schools should be allowed to become selective “in some circumstances”.²⁶

In explaining the rationale for the proposals, the Government stressed the need to move toward a more meritocratic system:

We are going to build a country that works for everyone, not just the privileged few. A fundamental part of that is having schools that give every child the best start in life, regardless of their background.

For too long we have tolerated a system that contains an arbitrary rule preventing selective schools from being established - sacrificing children's potential because of dogma and ideology. The truth is that we already have

²⁴ Prime Minister's Office/ DfE press release, [PM to set out plans for schools that work for everyone](#), 9 September 2016

²⁵ As above

²⁶ As above

selection in our school system – and its selection by house price, selection by wealth. That is simply unfair.²⁷

The announcement also set out other proposals to encourage higher education providers to sponsor under-performing local schools or set up new free schools.

New funding for grammar school expansion

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 2020-21.²⁸

Proposed funding for new selective free schools

On 7 March 2017, then-Prime Minister Theresa May wrote [an article](#) indicating that, in the coming weeks, the Government would publish a schools white paper which would, alongside other measures, “enable the creation of new selective free schools.”²⁹

On 8 March 2017, the [Spring Budget](#) (PDF) announced the Government would extend the free schools programme with investment of £320 million during the Parliament to help fund up to 140 new free schools, which would include selective schools³⁰ The budget also included funding for free transportation for children aged 11 to 16, who receive free school meals or whose parents claim Maximum Working Tax Credit. They would get free transport to attend the nearest selective school within 2 to 15 miles of their home. This was in line with [free transport provision](#) for those travelling to their nearest school on faith or belief grounds.

General election 2017: ban on new grammar schools to remain

The Conservative manifesto for the 2017 General Election confirmed the Government's intention to “lift the ban on the establishment of selective schools, subject to conditions, such as allowing pupils to join at other ages as well as eleven.”³¹

Following the loss of the Conservative majority at the election, the proposals did not appear in the [Queen's Speech](#) in June 2017, and the Education

²⁷ Prime Minister's Office/ DfE press release, [PM to set out plans for schools that work for everyone](#), 9 September 2016.

²⁸ HM Treasury, [Autumn Statement 2016](#), p44

²⁹ Prime Minister's Office, [Why I'm giving education a huge boost: article by Theresa May](#), 7 March 2017

³⁰ HM Treasury, [Spring Budget 2017](#), HC 1025, p42

³¹ Conservative manifesto 2017, p50

Secretary subsequently [confirmed](#) the existing ban on opening new grammar schools would remain in place.³²

Consultation response and funding for school expansion in 2018

The [Government response to the Schools that Work for Everyone consultation](#) was published in May 2018. The response confirmed the previous announcement that the ban on new selective schools would remain in place. The response made two key announcements:

- A [Memorandum of Understanding](#) between the Department for Education and the Grammar School Heads Association, focused on improving access to grammar schools for disadvantaged children.
- A [Selective School Expansion Fund](#), with £50m of funding in 2018-19 to expand selective schools.

In response to an [urgent question](#) in the Commons on 14 May 2018, the Education Secretary, Damian Hinds, confirmed the expansion fund was part of the £200m for selective school expansion announced by the Chancellor in the 2016 Autumn Statement.³³

The [Selective Schools Expansion Fund](#) financed 22 academy schools/local-authority-maintained schools that select by ability between 2018 and 2020.³⁴ The Government has said there will be no further rounds of the fund.³⁵

2.2

Education Committee report (2017)

In February 2017, the Commons Education Committee published its report [Evidence Check: Grammar Schools](#), which analysed the evidence base for the proposed expansion of grammar schools in England.³⁶ The Committee's report recommended:

- The Government's proposals should take account of the needs of the UK economy for a broadly skilled workforce, recognising that generally technical specialisation occurs later in a student's education;
- The Government should demonstrate how the policy would close the attainment gap within the school system;

³² [PQ 128, 27 June 2017](#)

³³ [HC Deb 14 May 2018 c41](#)

³⁴ Department for Education, [Selective schools expansion fund](#), December 2020

³⁵ [PQ 38863 \[Selective schools expansion fund\], 26 July 2022](#)

³⁶ Education Committee, [Government must show new grammars close attainment gap](#), 13 February 2017

- The Government should consider the consequences of the proposals for school funding, the supply of teachers, and the overall health of schools in England.³⁷

The Committee also questioned whether the admissions criteria for grammar schools could be made fair:

If, as the Minister suggested, a tutor-proof test is a ‘holy grail’, selection tests should not be the only basis on which admissions to grammar schools are based. The Government has yet to demonstrate how an admissions system could be designed in a manner which would be immune to gaming, or being reduced to the ability to pay.³⁸

The Committee’s Chair, Neil Carmichael, said:

The focus on opening new grammar schools is, in my view, an unnecessary distraction from the need to ensure all our young people are equipped with the skills to compete in the modern workplace.³⁹

2.3

Selected statements on grammar schools since 2010

Political parties

Conservative Party

On 21 September 2022, the then Education Secretary, Kit Malthouse, [confirmed](#) the new Liz Truss government planned work on grammar schools policy to enable parental choice.⁴⁰

In the leadership campaign to be Prime Minister, Rishi Sunak was asked whether he would “support the return of grammar schools”. Sunak replied “[yes](#)”. His team clarified that this meant expansion in “wholly selective areas”.⁴¹

Some senior Conservatives, such as Sir Graham Brady, have long supported Grammar Schools. In an interview in 2016, Sir Graham raised the issue of parental choice in favour of grammar schools:

We have a significant independent sector. Nobody questions whether selection should be allowed there. Parents who can’t pay fees should have the same

³⁷ Education Committee, [Evidence check: Grammar schools](#), (PDF), 13 February 2017, HC 780 2016-17, p18

³⁸ Education Committee, [Evidence check: Grammar schools](#), (PDF), 13 February 2017, HC 780 2016-17, p18

³⁹ Education Committee, [Government must show new grammars close attainment gap](#), 13 February 2017

⁴⁰ Schools Week, [PM asks Malthouse to draw up plans for new grammar schools](#), 22 September 2022

⁴¹ BBC News, [Tory leadership latest: Sunak says yes to return of grammar schools](#), 29 July 2022

choices in the state sector. If we allowed new grammars, some independent schools could become free state-supported academies, while retaining their current admissions arrangements.⁴²

Former Schools Minister, Jonathan Gullis, has also advocated ending the ban on new grammar schools, saying “creating new grammar schools would end the ‘geographic sweepstake’ in education quality.”⁴³

Following Rishi Sunak’s appointment as Prime Minister in autumn 2022, the Education Secretary, Gillian Keegan, said her [attention was on comprehensive schooling](#), which educates more pupils than grammars.⁴⁴

In 2018, Robert Halfon, former Education Select Committee Chair and current Minister for Skills, Apprenticeships and Higher Education, said [expanding grammar schools would not be value for money](#) given the majority of pupils in grammars are not on free school meals.⁴⁵

In 2012, Nick Gibb, Minister of State for Schools, addressed the Grammar School Heads Association, noting the high academic results of grammar schools and the potential for partnerships:

Grammar schools, through their own example; through the sponsorship of academies; through partnerships with underperforming schools; through the network of teaching schools; the education endowment fund; and through the national and local leaders of education programmes; have a unique opportunity to make this happen.⁴⁶

Labour Party

Shadow Education Secretary Bridget Phillipson has said [Labour would retain the existing legislative position](#) on grammar schools:

We do not support expansion of grammar schools. I’m saying that we wouldn’t seek to significantly change the existing system that we have. But we absolutely oppose any expansion.⁴⁷

Labour’s Deputy Leader, Angela Rayner, while Shadow Education Secretary, [wrote](#) in opposition to grammar schools, citing the low numbers of poorer children attending them. Rayner said the nationwide grammar school system that was ended by Labour in the 1960s “sowed division in our society, left too many young children feeling second best, and put a cap on aspiration, ambition and opportunity for millions.”⁴⁸ In her [speech to the Labour Party](#)

⁴² Guardian, [‘Why would a Tory object?’: crusader for grammar schools is having his moment](#), 8 November 2016

⁴³ The Week, [The pros and cons of grammar schools](#), 4 October 2022

⁴⁴ BBC, [Nick Robinson interview with Gillian Keegan](#), 5 November 2022

⁴⁵ [HC Deb 14 May 2022 c42](#)

⁴⁶ [Nick Gibb to the Grammar School Heads Association, Department for Education and The Rt Hon Nick Gibb MP. Speech, 16 April 2012](#)

⁴⁷ Telegraph, [Labour ‘absolutely opposes’ any expansion of grammar schools](#), 4 December 2022

⁴⁸ [“The Tories are harking back to a mythical ‘golden age’ of grammar schools”](#), Labour Uncut, 26 July 2016; see also [“Theresa May must ignore the Tory grammar school pleas if she wants to be truly One Nation”](#), Telegraph, 8 August 2016

[conference](#) in September 2016, Rayner said that she would “fight, with every breath in my body, against new grammar schools.”⁴⁹

Liberal Democrats

The Liberal Democrats have a long-standing [opposition to grammars](#). Education spokesperson Munira Wilson has said the government’s September 2022 proposal, led by Liz Truss, to lift the ban was “a desperate attempt” by the Tories to mask their own failures:

Rather than supporting children who are working hard to catch up on their lost learning [after the lockdowns], the Conservatives would rather impose top-down rules about the sorts of schools that can be built in communities”⁵⁰

Other comment

Iain Mansfield, a former senior civil servant, [has reported](#) that grammar schools significantly increase the chances of disadvantaged pupils reaching highly-selective universities, especially Oxbridge.⁵¹

There has been opposition to reverting policy on grammars by Katharine Birbalsingh, UK’s [social mobility tsar who in September 2022 said](#):

The problem with grammar schools nowadays is that, because there’s such an industry around preparing children to get into grammar schools, if you don’t have the resources or wherewithal to prepare your child to get in, then you can be left out

You look at grammar schools and think, how many children from deprived backgrounds are there, how many working-class children are there? There aren’t so many, these days.

It’s not wrong to suggest that in the [past] grammar schools would propel certain working-class children forward. I’m not sure they do that so much nowadays.⁵²

In February 2023, [BBC News published analysis](#) which stated that, while many grammar schools had quotas or gave priority to disadvantaged children, the impact was “patchy”, with a quarter of the 160 grammar schools having fewer than 5% of their pupils eligible for pupil premium support.⁵³

⁴⁹ Schools Week, [Angela Rayner: Full text of Labour Conference 2016 speech](#), 27 September 2016

⁵⁰ [‘They don’t work’: experts criticise Liz Truss’s grammar schools plan](#), The Guardian [online], 22 September 2022

⁵¹ Higher Education Policy Institute, [Grammar schools significantly increase the chances of disadvantaged pupils reaching highly-selective universities, especially Oxbridge](#), 10 January 2019

⁵² Guardian, [Social mobility tsar casts doubt over grammar school revival in England](#), 23 September 2022

⁵³ BBC News, [Grammar schools: some still failing to let in poorer pupils](#), 21 February 2023

Academic comment

In recent years there's been renewed questioning of the fairness of selection at an early age and the reliability of the 11 plus examination.⁵⁴ Selective schooling has raised the issue of social class, and the way some wealthier parents' might 'game' the system,⁵⁵ including by using fee-paying primary schools and private tuition.^{56,57}

Grammars being engines of social mobility is a common argument used by their proponents. Countering this, Binwei Lu at Durham University states:

... there is no evidence that grammar schools can promote social mobility by providing more opportunities for disadvantaged pupils, which is the major claim supporting their expansion. ... In LAs selecting more than 20% of their pupils into grammar schools, pupils eligible for free school meals, pupils with special educational needs, native English speakers and white pupils are less likely to go to grammar schools, while those from richer areas, from minority ethnic groups and those younger within a year group have higher chances when controlled for prior attainment.⁵⁸

Similarly, research by academics at three UK universities published in 2021 reported:

Our results provide no support for the contention that the selective schooling system increased social mobility in England, whether considered in absolute or relative terms.⁵⁹

Recent academic scholarship that follows the 2013 Jesson [review \(PDF\)](#)⁶⁰ at Durham University⁶¹ and the Institute of Education⁶², found a negligible impact from grammar schooling on improving pupils' academic and wider social outcomes.

⁵⁴ Maisuria A, Selective schooling for mystifying social class, neoliberalism and alternatives, 2022, 5th edition, chapter 10 Education Equality, and Human Rights

⁵⁵ Why do so few low- and middle-income children attend a grammar school? New evidence from the Millennium Cohort Study. [British Educational Research Journal](#), 45(3). February 2019, pp425–457

⁵⁶ Maisuria A, selective schooling for mystifying social class, neoliberalism and alternatives, 20.22, 5th edition, chapter 10 Education Equality, and Human Rights

⁵⁷ The association between private tutoring and access to grammar schools: Voices of Year 6 pupils and teachers in south-east England. [British Educational Research Journal](#), 46(3). December 2019, pp459–479

⁵⁸ Selection on attainment? Local authorities, pupil backgrounds, attainment and grammar school opportunities. [Educational Review](#), 72(1). 12 July 2020, pp68–87

⁵⁹ Selective Schooling Has Not Promoted Social Mobility in England. [SSRN Electronic Journal](#), 14640. 21 August 2021

⁶⁰ Jesson D, [The Creation, Development and Present State of Grammar Schools in England](#), (PDF) November 2013, p7

⁶¹ Durham University, [Grammar schools in England: a new approach to analysing their intakes and outcomes](#), 5 December 2016

⁶² Institute of Education, [Government's grammar school funding won't improve children's outcomes, say experts](#), 23 May 2018

YouGov surveys

Regular YouGov surveys estimate British public opinions about grammar schools. The findings show that public opinion is divided on this issue and opinions have not changed much in the last few years.⁶³

At the time of writing, the most recent findings are for September 2022 when around 1,800 people responded to the survey. 26% of respondents held a ‘positive view’ about grammar school selection⁶⁴, 23% of people held a ‘negative view’⁶⁵, 23% wanted to maintain the status quo,⁶⁶ and 28% were not sure.

The age group most likely to hold a ‘positive view’ were those aged over 65 (39% reported this view in September 2022 compared with just 14% of 18-24 year olds).⁶⁷

Broken down by location, people living in the South of England (excluding London) were the most likely to hold a ‘positive view’ (33% reported this view in September 2022 compared with just 16% of people in Scotland).⁶⁸

⁶³ YouGov, [How the government should handle grammar school selection](#) [accessed 12 December 2022]

⁶⁴ [Respondents believed that](#) “the government should encourage more schools to select by academic ability and build more grammar schools.”

⁶⁵ [Respondents believed that](#) “the government should stop selecting by academic ability and the existing grammar schools should be opened to children of all abilities.”

⁶⁶ [Respondents believed that](#) “The government should retain the existing grammar schools but should not allow more selective schools or new grammar schools to be built”

⁶⁷ YouGov, [How the government should handle grammar school selection](#) [accessed 12 December 2022]

⁶⁸ YouGov, [How the government should handle grammar school selection](#) [accessed 12 December 2022]

3 A brief history of grammar schools

3.1 The Education Act 1944

Grammar schools, secondary modern schools and technical schools formed what was known as the tripartite system, which arose from the interpretation of the Education Act 1944.⁶⁹ Grammar schools provided admission to children based on their ability and offered an academic education. Selection was usually made at the end of primary school in the form of the 11 plus examination. Secondary moderns provided a more general education with an emphasis on more practical subjects.⁷⁰ Technical schools provided a more general education but with a focus on technical subjects. The latter never existed in large numbers.⁷¹

Grammar schools had existed long before the 1944 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 did not charge fees.⁷²

3.2 1960s and 1970s

In 1960, less than 5% of the secondary school population was educated in comprehensive schools. Shortly after the 1964 general election, which returned Harold Wilson to power, the new Secretary of State for Education and Science, Michael Stewart, announced "that it was the Government's policy to reorganise secondary education along comprehensive lines."⁷³ Implementation of this policy, by Stewart's successor, Anthony Crosland, took the form of a Circular, 10/65, requesting local education authorities (LEAs) to reorganise secondary education on comprehensive lines, rather than legislation requiring them to do so. By the end of the 1960s there were over

⁶⁹ Michael Sanderson, *Technical School Education in England 1900-1990s*, 1994, p129

⁷⁰ Richard Aldrich (ed.), *A Century of Education*, 2002, p42-3

⁷¹ As above, p42

⁷² B.R. Mitchell, *British Historical Statistics*, Table XV.1, 1998

⁷³ Clyde Chitty, *Education Policy in Britain*, 2009, p29

1,300 comprehensive schools educating nearly one third of secondary school age pupils.⁷⁴

Circular 10/65 was withdrawn in 1970 by Circular 10/70, which reaffirmed the then Conservative Government's intention to allow individual LEAs to determine the shape of secondary education (selective or comprehensive) in their areas.⁷⁵ This was, in turn, withdrawn in 1974 by Circular 4/74, which restated the succeeding Labour Government's objectives of ending selection at 11 plus and moving to a fully comprehensive system. The Circular looked to authorities “to secure the effective execution of this policy” under the “control and direction” of the Secretary of State.⁷⁶

The Education Act 1976 sought to lay down the general principle of comprehensive education by empowering the Secretary of State to “call for proposals” from LEAs “to complete reorganisation” where they felt this was needed.⁷⁷ However, this was repealed in 1979 by the new Conservative Government's Education Act 1979, which removed the compulsion on LEAs to reorganise on comprehensive lines. Following the passing of the 1979 Act some authorities, including Essex and Kent, withdrew proposals submitted under the 1976 Act to go comprehensive and proposed to retain their existing divided systems.⁷⁸

During the 1960s and 1970s many grammar schools avoided closure or merging with comprehensives by moving to another local area with a different LEA or by challenging, through section 13 of the Education Act 1944, LEA proposals to reorganise particular schools.⁷⁹ Nevertheless, their number decreased significantly – more detail on the number of grammar schools and pupil numbers is provided in section 5.⁸⁰

3.3

The Conservative Governments 1979-1997

During the 1980s and 1990s there was debate about whether local authorities should be made to reorganise comprehensive schools and whether the Conservative Government should encourage more grammar schools.

In response to a written parliamentary question in January 1992, the then Secretary of State, Kenneth Clarke, said the Government supported diversity and choice in schooling and did not intend to impose any particular structure:

The Government do not intend to impose any particular organisational pattern for schools. I believe in a diversity of provision of schools and I am ready to

⁷⁴ Richard Aldrich (ed.), *A Century of Education*, 2002, p43

⁷⁵ Brian Simon, *Education and the Social Order 1940-1990*, p408

⁷⁶ As above, p432

⁷⁷ As above, p440

⁷⁸ As above, p474

⁷⁹ Richard Aldrich (ed.), *A Century of Education*, 2002, p44

⁸⁰ B.R. Mitchell, *British Historical Statistics*, Table XV.1, 1998

consider any application for change of character of school put forward by a local education authority for a maintained school or the governing body of a voluntary-aided or grant-maintained school. I will consider each application for a change of character from comprehensive to selective entry on its individual merits.⁸¹

In February 1992, Mr Clarke was reported as saying he had “no objection to the re-emergence of grammar schools” and would have “no problem” with one grant-maintained school in ten becoming a grammar school.⁸²

Shortly after the 1992 general election the new Education Secretary, John Patten, said in response to a parliamentary question that there would not be any change in policy and the Government did not intend to impose any particular organisational pattern for schools:

We have consistently made it clear that the Government do not intend to impose any particular organisational pattern for schools. It is, in the first instance, for local education authorities and school governors to establish the organisation most appropriate for their area, in the light of local needs and the wishes of parents and the community.

We firmly believe in a diversity of provision of schools and in maximising choice for parents. We are ready to consider any application for a change in a school's character put forward by a local education authority or by the governors of voluntary schools or grant-maintained schools.⁸³

In 1996, Gillian Shephard, the then Education Secretary, promised options for allowing more selection at 11 and echoed the then Prime Minister in agreeing that the proposals might result in “a grammar school in every town.”⁸⁴ The subsequent white paper, *Self-Government for Schools*, was published in June 1996. It reiterated the policy of providing a greater choice of schools, including selective schools:

The Government wants parents to be able to choose from a range of good schools of different types, matching what they want for their child with what a school offers. This choice should include schools which select by academic ability, so that the most able children have the chance to achieve the best of which they are capable.⁸⁵

The Education Bill 1996-97 included proposals to give schools greater powers to select pupils by ability. However, the relevant clauses were dropped from

⁸¹ HC Deb 28 January 1992 c509W

⁸² “[Clarke points to comeback of the grammar school](#)”, *The Times*, 3 February 1992, p1 (log-in required). Grant-maintained schools were schools that opted out of local authority control and received their funding direct from central government. They were created following the Education Reform Act 1988 and abolished following the School Standards and Framework Act 1998.

⁸³ HC Deb 19 May 1992 c138

⁸⁴ “[Interview with Gillian Shepherd](#)”, *On the Record*, BBC website.

⁸⁵ DfEE, *Self-Government for Schools*, Cmnd 3315, June 1996, p2, cited in Clyde Chitty, *Education Policy in Britain*, 2009, p56.

the version of the Bill that received Royal Assent before the 1997 General Election.⁸⁶

The 1997 Conservative Party manifesto promised a Conservative Government would “help schools to become grammar schools in every major town where parents wanted that choice.”⁸⁷ The Labour Party’s manifesto said a Labour Government would “never force the abolition of good schools whether in the private or the state sector” and “any changes in the admissions policies of grammar schools will be decided by local parents”.⁸⁸

3.4 The Labour Governments 1997-2010

Following the 1997 General Election, the new Labour Government issued the white paper, *Excellence in Schools*. This stressed that, whilst there would be no going back to the 11-plus, where grammar schools already existed any change in their admission policies would be decided by local parents, and not by LEAs.⁸⁹

As outlined in section 1 above, the subsequent School Standards and Framework Act 1998 made provision for parental ballots on the future of grammar schools. It also prohibits local authority maintained schools from operating arrangements under which pupils are selected for ability or aptitude unless the school is a grammar school designated under section 104 of the Act, or the arrangements are a form of selection permitted under section 99.⁹⁰

When giving evidence to the Education Committee on 11 December 2002, Charles Clarke, the then Education Secretary, said selection regimes produced a system that inhibited educational opportunities for significant numbers of people. He said that although the Government did not have any plans for legislation, he believed LEAs which had kept selective admission procedures should “look at their practices self-critically”.⁹¹ On the *Breakfast with Frost* programme on 19 January 2003, Mr Clarke said there would be no ideological attack on grammar schools but he would be looking at the quality of education provided.⁹²

⁸⁶ [The Education Bill 1996/97](#), Commons Library Research Paper 96/101, 6 November 1996, p14-20. The [Education Act 1993](#) (as enacted).

⁸⁷ Conservative Party Manifesto 1997, p24

⁸⁸ Labour Party Manifesto 1997, cited in *The Times Guide to the House of Commons* May 1997, 1997, p310

⁸⁹ Cm 3681, July 1997, p 72, paragraph 34

⁹⁰ The [School Standards and Framework Act 1998](#)

⁹¹ Education and Skills Committee, [Minutes of Evidence taken before the Education and Skills Committee on 11 December 2002](#), HC 177-I, 4 February 2003

⁹² ["BBC Breakfast with Frost interview: Charles Clarke MP, Education Secretary", January 19 2003](#), BBC News (last accessed 12 December 2014).

The 2010 Labour Party manifesto said a Labour Government would “reject a return to the 11-plus”.⁹³ The Conservative manifesto did not explicitly mention grammar schools or selection.

3.5 2010-15 Coalition Government and the Conservatives since 2015

In December 2013, two proposals for the establishment of a satellite grammar school in Sevenoaks, one submitted by Weald of Kent Grammar School in Tonbridge and the other by Invicta Grammar School in Maidstone, were rejected by the then Education Secretary, Michael Gove. In the case of the Weald of Kent Grammar School, it was reportedly because the annex school was planned to be co-educational, whereas the parent school was single-sex. In the case of Invicta Grammar, it was reported that the proposal was rejected because the proposed annex did not serve the parent school’s existing community.⁹⁴

In a written ministerial statement on 15 October 2015 the then Education Secretary, Nicky Morgan, said she had approved a revised proposal from the Weald of Kent Grammar School to expand onto a satellite site in Sevenoaks. The statement set out some of the reasoning behind the decision and the Secretary of State’s view that the proposal represented “a genuine expansion of the existing school”:

The Weald of Kent Grammar School submitted a proposal for expansion in 2013. At that stage the then Secretary of State could not approve the proposal as an expansion because the proposal at that time was for a mixed sex annexe when the existing school was single sex. The school submitted a revised proposal in September 2015 under which girls will be educated on both sites alongside a mixed sex sixth form. I am satisfied that this proposal represents a genuine expansion of the existing school, and that there will be integration between the two sites in terms of leadership, management, governance, admissions and curriculum. I am also satisfied that the excellent quality of learning currently delivered will be replicated across the newly expanded school. I welcome the fact that the newly expanded school will better meet the needs of parents in the local area, with 41% of existing pupils at the Weald of Kent Grammar School already travelling from the Sevenoaks area. [...]

My decision in this case has been taken on the basis of the proposal from the Weald of Kent, in line with legislation and criteria determining what constitutes an expansion. It does not reflect a change in this Government’s position on selective schools. Rather it reaffirms our view that all good schools should be able to expand, a policy which is vital to meet the significant increase in demand for pupil places in coming years. Further applications from good

⁹³ Labour Party Manifesto 2010, p3-4

⁹⁴ “[Sevenoaks grammar school annexe bids rejected](#)”, BBC News, 13 December 2013
 “[Plan for new grammar school blocked by Michael Gove](#)”, Daily Telegraph, 13 December 2013.
 “[Blow for supporters of selective schooling as Education Department vetoes major expansion of grammar school places in Kent](#)”, Independent, 13 December 2013.

selective schools to expand will continue to be considered within the framework of the statutory prohibition on new selective schools and would have to meet the criteria for being a genuine expansion.⁹⁵

On 19 October 2015, the then Education Secretary made an oral statement⁹⁶ in which she set out more of the reasoning behind her decision to approve the application:

The expanded school will be girls only on both sites from 2017, with a co-ed sixth form also on both sites from September 2018. It therefore fully reflects the existing school. It will share leadership, governance, administration arrangements and admissions policies across the school. The school intends to bring all year sevens together for at least half a day a week, and that will extend to all five-year groups as the extended site fills up.

There will be a range of cross-site curricular activities, including in personal, social, health and economic education, languages and music, reflecting the integrated split-site school. In addition, the school will continue to operate a house system that will apply to students regardless of their site location, and this will further secure regular, cross-site learning. New staff contracts will make it clear that staff are expected to work on both sites.

All policies and procedures, including uniform, behaviour and safeguarding, will apply across the newly expanded school. Furthermore, the expansion will meet the needs of the community within the school's existing catchment area, with 41.6% of current pupils travelling from the Sevenoaks area, as my right hon. Friend the Member for Sevenoaks (Michael Fallon) has tirelessly reminded me.⁹⁷

She also emphasised that the Government had “no plans to change their policy on grammar schools” and any further applications to expand would be “considered on their individual circumstances and merits”.⁹⁸

In response, then Shadow Education Secretary, Lucy Powell, said the creation of the Sevenoaks site constituted the creation of a new school:

The decision to allow a so-called annexe 10 miles from an existing school in a different town is what everybody knows it to be: a new school. As such it will be the first new grammar school to open in more than 50 years. It is also the first test of the School Standards and Framework Act 1998, and as such it warrants proper parliamentary scrutiny. That legislation is clear: no new state-funded grammar school can be opened.⁹⁹

She also called on the Secretary of State to publish the advice she was given and said the decision would “open the floodgates” for similar applications.¹⁰⁰ The Secretary of State responded saying there were “no applications sitting

⁹⁵ [HCWS242](#), 15 October 2015

⁹⁶ An urgent question was granted, which was subsequently converted into an oral statement in order to allow the Prime Minister to make a statement beforehand.

⁹⁷ [HC Deb 19 October 2015 c680](#)

⁹⁸ As above.

⁹⁹ [HC Deb 19 October 2015, c682](#)

¹⁰⁰ As above.

on my desk at the moment” and the Government “do not publish legal advice given to Ministers”.¹⁰¹

A consultation was launched on the 12 September 2016 on the case for creating more good school places.¹⁰² The consultation, [Schools that work for everyone](#), ran between 12 September and 12 December in 2016.

The consultation’s ‘case for change’ in relation to grammar schools included the following key section:

We believe that there is a case for relaxing restrictions on selective education, in order to provide more good school places within the system – whether through the expansion of existing grammars, the creation of new selective schools or through allowing non-selective schools to become selective – in the interests of improving education standards and increasing choice for parents. And we believe that this can and should be to the betterment of, not at the expense of, other local schools – by supporting the creation of new good school places in non-selective schools locally at the same time.

This chapter sets out our proposals to increase the number of good school places by lifting the restrictions on selection, but at the same time requiring selective schools to play a greater role in raising standards at other schools. In doing so, we do not propose a re-introduction of the binary or tripartite system of the past or a simple expansion of existing selective institutions. We propose that selective schools should be asked to contribute to non-selective schooling in certain ways, ensuring the expansion of good selective education alongside the creation of new good school places in nonselective schools. We believe that these proposals will make grammar schools engines of academic and social achievement for all pupils, whatever their background, wherever they are from and whatever their ability.¹⁰³

The consultation also said the Government would encourage multi-academy trusts to select within their trust:

We will make clear that multi-academy trusts and/or other good or outstanding academies can already establish a single centre in which to educate their “most able” pupils. This centre could be ‘virtual’ or have a physical location.¹⁰⁴

The response to this consultation was published in May 2018 (see section 2.1).¹⁰⁵

On 14 September 2016, the then Education Secretary, Justine Greening, gave [evidence to the Education Committee](#) across the range of her responsibilities, including grammar schools. She set out the following considerations as the basis for the consultation:

¹⁰¹ As above, c683

¹⁰² [Schools that work for everyone, Department for Education, Consultation outcome, 12 September 2016](#)

¹⁰³ DfE, [Schools that work for everyone](#), September 2016, p22

¹⁰⁴ As above, p27

¹⁰⁵ [Schools that work for everyone, Department for Education, Consultation outcome, 12 September 2016](#)

[response to Q260] **Justine Greening:** I think the first thing to say is that for the children in grammars, particularly children on free school meals, their progress comes on in leaps and bounds. The grammars are closing the attainment gap that we have between disadvantaged children who are on free school meals and other children and doing a great job of that. They absolutely have something to offer in helping us make sure that children do not get left behind, but if they have been left behind, catch up. The real prize is making sure that they do that, but at the same time play a role bettering other schools around them as well. That is the real prize and that is what we were consulting on, Michelle, because it is important that we get both of those issues addressed.

I suppose what we were saying and why we wanted to raise the debate and kick off the consultation document is we have frozen grammar schools policy literally for decades and it is now time to say we are where we are, but how do we take this forward? Grammars can play a role in driving social mobility, so what is that going to take? Shouldn't we give parents more choice at the same time if that is the kind of school that they want to send their child to?¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁶ Education Committee, [Oral evidence: Role and Responsibilities of the Secretary of State for Education](#), HC 196, 14 September 2016

4 Grammar schools and disadvantaged children: pre-2018 analysis

The impact of grammar schools on disadvantaged pupils and social mobility is an area of debate between supporters and opponents.

4.1 Coalition Government comment

In a speech on 19 June 2014 the then Schools Minister, David Laws, called on grammar schools to be more open to disadvantaged pupils and said he wanted all grammar schools to give preference to Pupil Premium pupils – that is, pupils from less affluent backgrounds – in their admissions.¹⁰⁷

Similarly, in response to a parliamentary question on 1 July 2014, Lord Nash, then Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Schools, said:

The Government is committed to closing the attainment gap between disadvantaged children and their peers. Grammar schools and the highest performing non-selective schools currently have some of the lowest representations of children eligible for free school meals in England. We want to encourage all high performing schools, including grammar schools to do more to attract and support disadvantaged children.¹⁰⁸

4.2 Parliamentary Office of Science and Technology briefing: Academic evidence

In December 2016, the Parliamentary Office of Science and Technology published a briefing on [Academic Evidence on Selective Secondary Education](#). The briefing said, among other findings:

- Historic and current data show that children who are eligible for Free School Meals (FSM) are less likely to attend a grammar school than children who are not eligible for FSM. This is the case even when comparing only those pupils who achieve similar high levels in English and Maths at the end of primary school. Research suggests that this is because children from poorer backgrounds have less access to economic, social, and cultural resources, such as high-quality primary

¹⁰⁷ [‘David Laws speech on grammar schools’](#), Gov.uk, 19 June 2014.

¹⁰⁸ [PQ HL723 \[on grammar schools\], 1 July 2014](#)

school education and private tuition, which help children to perform well at school and prepare for entrance exams.

- Academic attainment at GCSE level is on average higher for pupils attending grammar schools than for pupils who attend other types of school. When comparing pupils who achieved similar high levels in English and Maths at the end of primary school, most studies report a statistically significant but modest difference.
- To understand the impact of academic selection on pupil attainment it is important to also look at outcomes for the majority of pupils who did not get into grammar school in a selective area. When comparing pupils who achieved similar levels at the end of primary school, available studies report that academic attainment at GCSE level is on average lower for pupils in selective areas who attend non-grammar schools than for pupils in nonselective areas. This finding is statistically significant but very modest.
- Differences in outcomes for 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 and found that the selective education system as a whole does 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 data suggests that selective education systems widen educational inequality.¹⁰⁹

4.3

Sutton Trust

The Sutton Trust [published research](#) in December 2016 which said students from families on below average incomes (those ‘Just About Managing’), were significantly under-represented at grammar schools. The research also found:

- Disadvantaged white British children enter grammar school at the lowest rate of any major ethnic group;
- While there had been modest increases in the rate of grammar entry for disadvantaged black children and white non-British over the past five years, the rate of white British entry had not improved;

¹⁰⁹ Parliamentary Office of Science and Technology, [Academic Evidence on Selective Secondary Education](#), 16 December 2016

- High proportions of grammar school pupils come from the independent primary school sector, at roughly double the rate that might be expected;
- Much of the higher pupil achievement at grammar schools is attributable to high levels of prior attainment of the pupils entering grammars, and that highly able pupils achieve just as well in top comprehensives as they do in grammar schools.¹¹⁰

4.4 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:

- 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;
- Grammar schools attract more experienced staff;
- Poor children are less likely to get into 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.¹¹¹

4.5 Education Policy Institute

In September 2016, the Education Policy Institute (EPI) published a report on the [impact of grammar schools on social mobility](#). The following is drawn from the EPI's summary of its findings (emphasis in original):

1. Once prior attainment and pupil background is taken into consideration, **we find no overall attainment impact of grammar schools, either positive or negative.**
2. Pupils **who are eligible for free school meals (FSM), a proxy for disadvantage, are under-represented in grammar schools.** Only

¹¹⁰ Sutton Trust, [Gaps in Grammar](#), 9 December 2016

¹¹¹ Education Datalab, [Research briefing: Grammar schools](#), September 2016

2.5 per cent of grammar school pupils are entitled to FSM, compared with an average of 13.2 per cent in all state funded secondary schools.

3. **We do not find a significant positive impact on social mobility.** The gap between children on FSM (attaining five A*-C GCSEs, including English and Maths) and all other children is actually wider in selective areas than in non-selective areas – at around 34.1 per cent compared with 27.8 per cent.
4. **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 small attainment losses for those not attending selective schools – losses which will be greatest amongst poor children.**
5. If you compare high attaining pupils in grammar schools with similar pupils who attend high quality non selective schools, there are **five times as many high quality non selective schools as there are grammar schools.**
6. Other interventions to raise school standards and attainment have proven to be more effective than grammar schools in raising the attainment of disadvantaged pupils. The Labour **sponsored academies programme has had a more positive impact on the attainment of disadvantaged pupils compared with the present grammar school system.**¹¹²

[Further analysis](#) published by the EPI in December 2016 said it was difficult to identify areas for grammar school expansion that would avoid damage to pupils who did not access the new selective places.¹¹³

4.6

Institute for Fiscal Studies

In September 2016, the IFS published an article setting out evidence on [grammar schools and social mobility](#):

- Entrants to current grammar schools are four times as likely to have been educated outside of the state system than to be entitled to free school meals despite the fact that across the population at least six times as many 11-12 year olds are entitled to free school meals than were previously educated outside the state system. [...]
- There is robust evidence that attending a grammar school is good for the attainment and later earnings of those who get in. But there is equally good evidence that those in selective areas who don't pass the

¹¹² Education Policy Institute, [Grammar schools and social mobility](#), 23 September 2016

¹¹³ Education Policy Institute, [Grammar schools and social mobility – further analysis of policy options](#), 12 December 2016

eleven plus do worse than they would have done in a comprehensive system. [...]

- There are benefits from a selective system for those who make it into selective schools. Expanding grammar schools may thus be a way of improving the educational achievement of the brightest pupils and there is clear evidence that this is an area where England lags behind other countries. However, those who don't get into grammar schools do worse than in a comprehensive system. Is there a way of getting the benefits without the costs?
- Grammar schools therefore seem to offer an opportunity to improve and stretch the brightest pupils, but seem likely to come at the cost of increasing inequality. Inner London, by contrast, has been able to improve results amongst the brightest pupils and reduce inequality. This suggests that London schools probably offer more lessons on ways to improve social mobility than do grammar schools.¹¹⁴

4.7 Chris Cook articles

In an [article](#) in the Financial Times in 2013, the journalist Chris Cook analysed evidence from areas of England where selective schools remained in place, and concluded “the net effect of grammar schools is to disadvantage poor children and help the rich.”¹¹⁵ [Revisiting](#) the subject for the BBC in 2016, Cook said:

There is no aggregate improvement in results in areas that are selective. The most important change is a clear distributional shift in who does well. In short, the minority of children streamed into the grammars do better. The remaining majority of children - who are not educated in grammars - do slightly worse. [...]

What about the argument that grammar schools are good for social mobility? They offer, the argument goes, a private-standard education to families who cannot afford fees. But there is a serious problem with this argument: it is children from poorer backgrounds who are most likely to be dropped by the selection process.¹¹⁶

4.8 Institute for Social and Economic Research

A 2014 [study by the Institute for Social and Economic Research](#) (ISER), analysing the progress of grammar school children from Aberdeen in the 1950s, found:

¹¹⁴ Institute for Fiscal Studies, [Can grammar schools improve social mobility?](#), 12 September 2016

¹¹⁵ “[Grammar school myths](#)”, Financial Times, 28 January 2013

¹¹⁶ “[Why not bring back grammar schools?](#)”, BBC News, 14 July 2016

[...] looking at the long-run impacts of the grammar school system on borderline 11-plus passers has found grammar school girls go on to earn 20 per cent more and have significantly fewer children. Grammar-educated boys were more likely to reach A' levels but otherwise saw no real advantage in wages by the age of 50. [...]

The research found that for girls, grammar school led to an average of almost one whole additional year of full-time education, increasing their chances of getting A' levels by almost 25 per cent. Grammar school education led to a 20 per cent increase in gross income, a 10 per cent increase in wages and a significantly decreased fertility rate, by an average of 0.5 children per family.

Men who attended grammar school had more than one year additional full-time education, and doubled the probability of receiving a degree, but the data shows no bearing on their income, wages or fertility by the age of 50. This was possibly a result of the fact that by being selected into a grammar school some men pursued academic qualifications rather than gaining on-the-job experience through trade apprenticeships.¹¹⁷

¹¹⁷ Institute for Social Economic Research, [The lifelong impact of 11 plus success](#), April 2014

5 Grammar school statistics

5.1 National trends in grammar schools since 1947

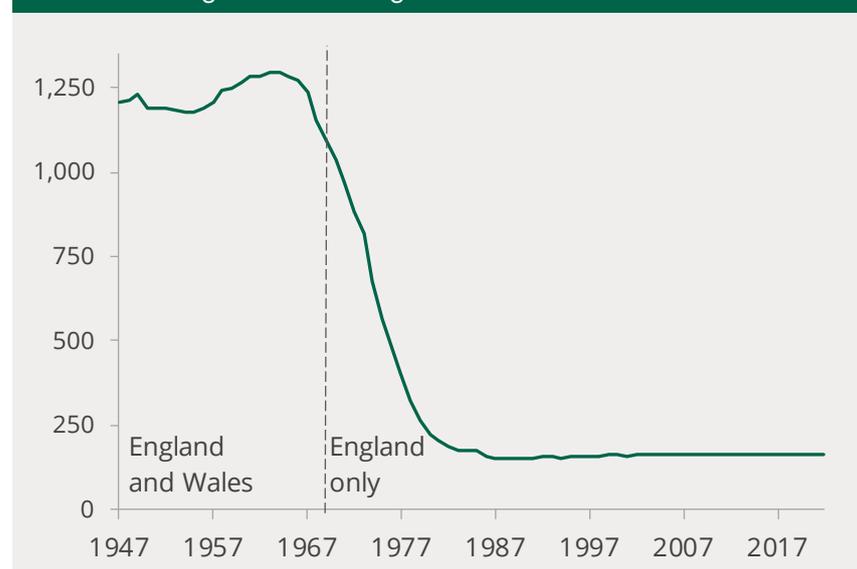
In January 2022, around 188,000 pupils attended 163 grammar schools (5.3% of state-funded secondary pupils).

The number of grammar schools peaked at 1,298 in 1964. The absolute number of pupils in state grammar schools also peaked in 1964 (around 726,000 pupils).¹¹⁸ However, the proportion of secondary school pupils in grammars was highest in 1947 at just under 38%.

This could be because most grammars already existed and so 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.

The number of grammars peaked in 1964 followed by rapid declines in the 1970s

State-funded grammars in England since 1969



Notes: These figures do not include direct-grant grammar schools which continued outside the maintained sector after the 1944 Act.

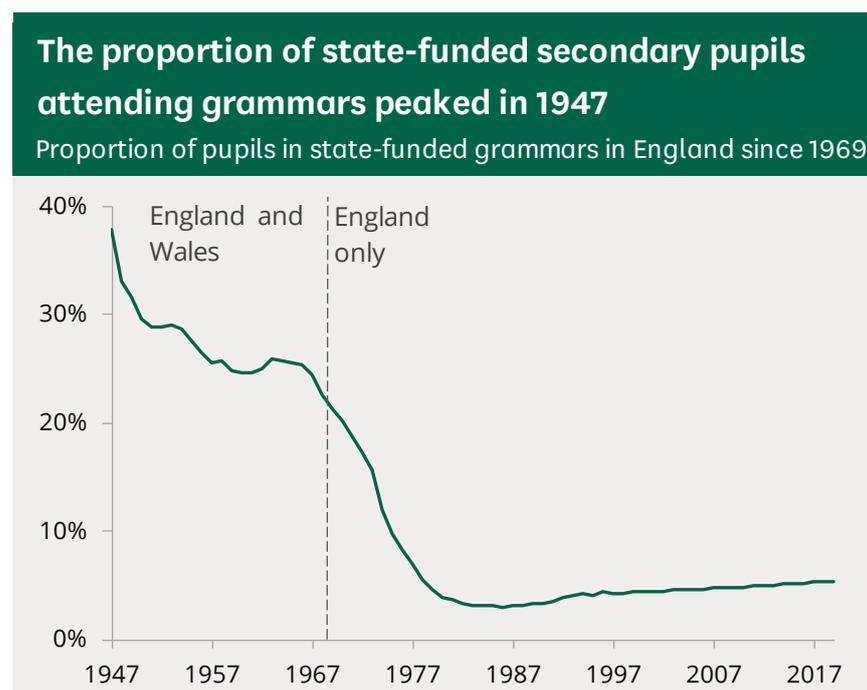
Sources: Department for Education, [Schools, pupils and their characteristics](#): January 2022, 9 June 2022; B.R. Mitchell, British Historical Statistics, Table XV.1, 1988

¹¹⁸ B.R. Mitchell, British Historical Statistics, Table XV.1, 1998

The fastest period of decline in both the number of grammar schools and the proportion of pupils attending grammars was the 1970s. Between 1971-1978, 650 grammar schools closed. An average of more than 90 per year. The last grammar school in Wales closed in 1988.

There was a small increase in the number of grammar schools in England between the 1990s and early 2000s (from 150 in 1990 to 164 in 2004).

This number has remained largely unchanged. There are currently 163 grammar schools in England due to the merger of two grammars in Kent at the start of academic year 2013/14.¹¹⁹



Notes: These figures do not include direct-grant grammar schools which continued outside the maintained sector after the 1944 Act.

Sources: Department for Education, [Schools, pupils and their characteristics](#): January 2022, 9 June 2022; B.R. Mitchell, British Historical Statistics, Table XV.1, 1988

Under the [School Standards and Framework Act 1998](#) no new maintained grammar school could be opened, and existing schools could not introduce new selection by ability.¹²⁰

However, [changes to the School Admissions Code](#) made in 2012, made it easier for schools, including grammar schools, to expand their numbers. In addition, the Chancellor's [Autumn Statement](#) on 23 November 2016 included £50m for the expansion of existing grammar schools each year from financial year 2017-18 to 2020-21.¹²¹

¹¹⁹ Chatham House Grammar School for Boys and Clarendon House Grammar School

¹²⁰ [Education and Inspections Act 2006](#), section 39 and [School Standards and Framework Act 1998](#), sections 99 and 104. Also see [HL Deb 16 February 2012 cWA184-5](#)

¹²¹ HM Treasury, [Autumn Statement 2016](#), p44

For these reasons, since 1998 there has been a gradual increase in the number and proportion of pupils at existing grammar schools.

The proportion of state-funded secondary pupils attending grammars increased from 4.2% in 1998, to 5.3% in 2017, this rate has not changed in the last six years.

In January 2022, 66% of grammars were full or had more pupils than their stated capacity, compared to 22% of all state-funded secondary schools in academic year 2020/21.¹²²

5.2 Where are grammar schools located?

The geographic distribution of the 163 grammars in England is very uneven.

In January 2022 the South East region had the highest proportion of state secondary pupils attending grammar schools (12% of secondary pupils), followed by the South West with 7%. The North East is the only region in England with no grammar schools. Yorkshire and the Humber and the East of England were the regions with the next lowest rates of grammar school pupils (2% respectively).¹²³

As in previous years, in January 2022, the Department for Education classified eleven local authorities 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).¹²⁴

In these 11 local authorities (labelled on the map below) there were 99 grammar schools. While 116 local authorities have no grammar schools.

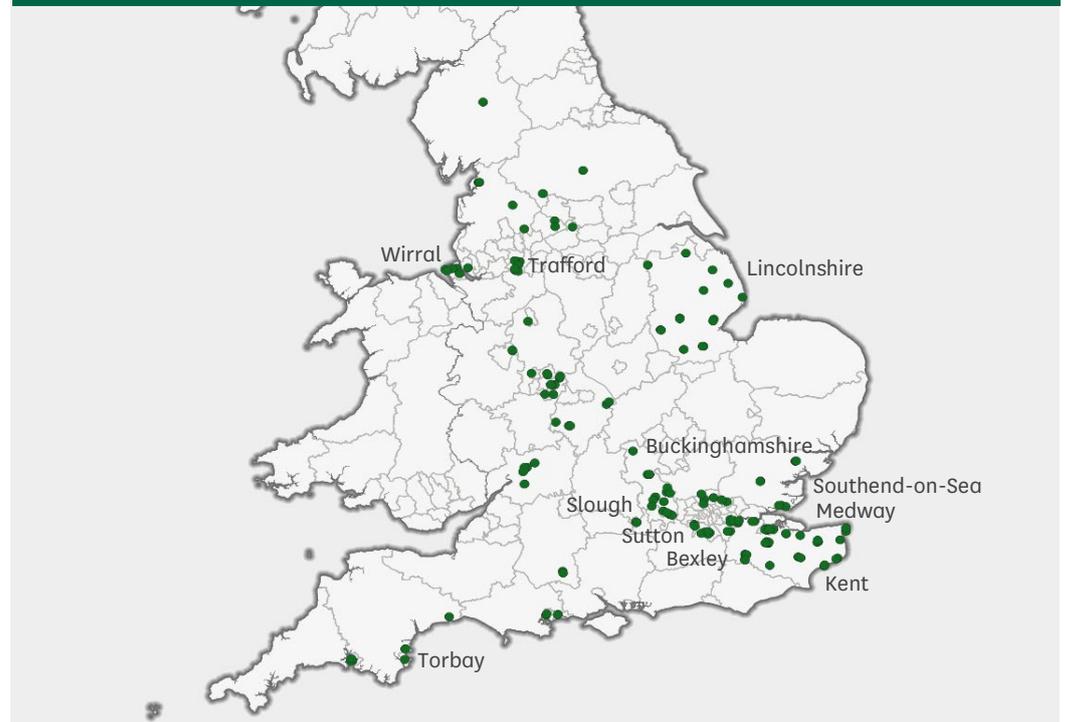
¹²² Department for Education, [Get Information About Schools](#), (filtered for state-funded secondary schools with selective admissions policies) [accessed 28 October 2022]; Department for Education, [School capacity: 2020/21](#), 24 March 2022

¹²³ Department for Education, [Schools pupils and their characteristics: January 2022](#), 9 June 2022 [[custom table](#) created 28 October 2022]

¹²⁴ These local authorities are Bexley, Buckinghamshire, Kent, Lincolnshire, Medway, Slough, Southend-on-Sea, Sutton, Torbay, Trafford and Wirral. Department for Education, [Key Stage 4 performance: 2022](#), 20 October 2022 (National data, data guidance download, footnote 12)

Around 60% of grammars are in 11 Local Authorities

England, January 2022



Source: Department for Education, [Get Information About Schools](#)

5.3 Pupil characteristics

It is not possible to make like for like comparisons with grammar pupil characteristics and national averages. This is because grammars are not distributed evenly around the country, meaning differences could be explained by other ‘local factors’.

The Department for Education publishes pupil characteristics broken down by selective schools and non-selective schools. However, it does not differentiate between non-selective schools in highly selective areas, and those in non-selective areas.

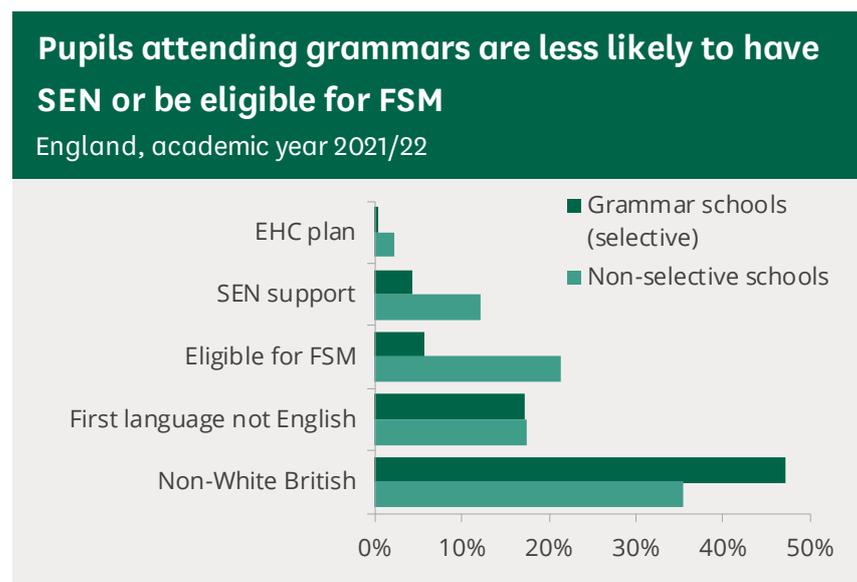
The data below compares average pupil characteristics in grammar schools with non-selective schools.¹²⁵ Due to the issues outlined above, readers should not attach too much significance to small differences.

In the academic year 2021/22, pupils at grammar schools were much less likely than pupils at non-selective schools to:

¹²⁵ Schools with no published admissions policy are excluded. State-funded secondary schools only.

- Have an Education Health and Care (EHC) Plan for complex special educational needs (0.4% compared to 2.3%),
- Have Special Educational Needs support (SEN support), (around 4% compared to 12%).¹²⁶
- Be eligible for free school meals (around 6% compared to 21%).¹²⁷

In 2021/22, grammar schools had a higher than average proportion of Non-White British pupils (around 47% compared to 35%) while there was very little difference in English as a first language (around 17% for both school types).¹²⁸



Notes: Schools with no published admissions policy are excluded. State-funded secondary schools only. Education, health and care plan ([EHC plan](#)), Special educational needs support ([SEN support](#)), free school meals ([FSM](#))

Sources: Department for Education, [Special Educational Needs in England: January 2022](#); 16 June 2022 (underlying data); Department for Education, [Schools pupils and their characteristics: January 2022](#), 9 June 2022 [[custom table](#) created 28 October 2022]

Free school meals

As outlined above, the proportion of grammar school pupils known to be eligible for free school meals ([FSM](#)) is much lower than the national average (around 6% of pupils compared to 21% in all state-funded schools in January 2022).

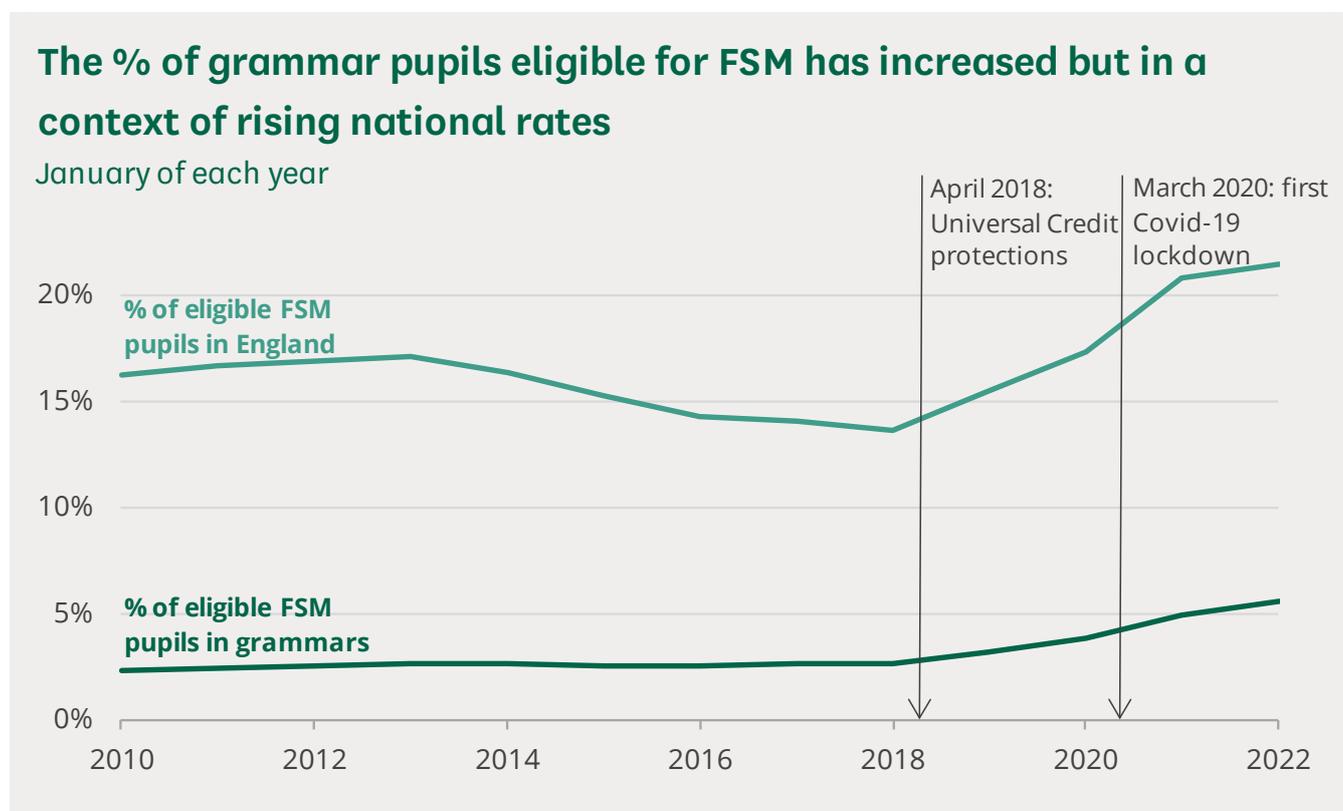
The proportion of grammar school pupils eligible for FSM has increased since 2010 when the eligibility rate was just 2%. Most of this increase has occurred since 2018.

¹²⁶ Department for Education, [Special Educational Needs in England: January 2022](#); 16 June 2022

¹²⁷ Department for Education, [Schools pupils and their characteristics: January 2022](#), 9 June 2022

¹²⁸ Department for Education, [Schools pupils and their characteristics: January 2022](#), 9 June 2022

During this time the national FSM eligibility rate has also increased (from around 14% in 2018 to 21% in 2022). This is due to several factors including [the introduction of transitional protections for Universal Credit claimants](#), and the effect of the Covid-19 pandemic on the labour market.



Source: Department for Education, [Schools pupils and their characteristics: January 2022](#), 9 June 2022; and other years.

5.4 GCSE Attainment

Box 1: GCSE attainment measures

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

Further information about [calculating Attainment 8](#) is available from the DfE.

Higher pass is achieving 9-5 grades in English and Maths GCSE. Roughly comparable to A* - low B under [the previous letter grade system](#).

Standard pass is achieving 9-5 grades in English and Maths GCSE. Roughly comparable to A* - C under [the previous letter grade system](#).

There are many different GCSE attainment measures. The GCSE attainment measures examined below (Attainment 8, and proportion of pupils achieving

higher, or standard passes) show that results for grammar schools are much better, on average, than those for non-selective schools.¹²⁹ This is unsurprising given grammar schools select all or most of their pupils based on examination of their academic ability.

The headline GCSE attainment measures show the difference in attainment is greatest between grammar schools and non-selective schools in highly selective areas.¹³⁰ However, headline attainment does not control for the differences in pupil intake or the uneven geographic distribution of grammar schools outlined in section 5.2 and 5.3. In addition, pupils can attend schools outside of the local authority they live in, grammar schools are likely to draw their pupils from beyond their immediate local area.

In 2022, the standard pass rate in grammar schools was around 98%, this was a difference of 36 percentage points compared with non-selective schools in highly selective areas, and a difference of 29 percentage points compared with non-selective schools in other areas.¹³¹

The “gap” in attainment between grammars and non-selective schools was even wider for the higher pass rate. In 2022, the higher pass rate in grammar schools was around 94%, this was a difference of 56 percentage points compared with non-selective schools in highly selective areas, and a difference of 45 percentage points compared with non-selective schools in other areas.¹³²

GCSE Results by admissions policy

Mainstream schools in England, 2022

	Attainment 8	% achieving "higher pass"	% achieving "standard pass"
Non-selective schools in highly selective areas	44.2	38.6	61.8
Non-selective schools in other areas	48.9	49.4	69.4
Grammar schools	74.1	94.2	98.2
All state-funded mainstream schools	49.7	50.7	70.1

Note: See Box 1 for GCSE attainment measure definitions.

Source: Department for Education, [Key Stage 4 performance: 2022](#), 20 October 2022 [[custom table](#) created 14 December 2022]

It is not possible to control for all pupil intake characteristics. However, the table below shows that the attainment gap between grammar and non-

¹²⁹ Department for Education, [Key Stage 4 performance: 2022](#), 20 October 2022

¹³⁰ Highly selective areas where 25% or more of state-funded secondary pupils attend grammars: Bexley, Buckinghamshire, Kent, Lincolnshire, Medway, Slough, Southend-on-Sea, Sutton, Torbay, Trafford and Wirral. Department for Education, [Key Stage 4 performance: 2022](#), 20 October 2022 (National data, data guidance download, footnote 12)

¹³¹ Standard pass rate is the proportion of pupils achieving 9-4 grades in English and Maths GCSE. Department for Education, [Key Stage 4 performance: 2022](#), 20 October 2022

¹³² Higher pass rate is the proportion of pupils achieving 9-5 grades in English and Maths GCSE. Department for Education, [Key Stage 4 performance: 2022](#), 20 October 2022

selective schools outlined above, narrows (but does not disappear) once headline attainment measures are broken down by prior attainment band.

Unsurprisingly, pupils at grammar schools (who are usually selected based on academic attainment) were much less likely to have low prior attainment (measured at key stage 2) when starting secondary school.

In 2022, just 0.3% of grammar pupils had low prior attainment compared to the 23.5% national mainstream average. Grammar pupils were much more likely to have high prior attainment (69.7% in 2022 compared to the 21.0% national mainstream average).¹³³

This means 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.

For example, in 2022 around 99% of grammar pupils with high prior attainment achieved the standard pass. This was a difference of around six percentage points compared with non-selective schools in highly selective areas, and a difference of just two percentage points compared with non-selective schools in other areas.

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

GCSE Results by prior attainment and admissions policy			
Mainstream schools in England, 2022			
	Attainment	% achieving	% achieving
	8	"higher pass"	"standard pass"
Low prior attainment:			
Non-selective schools in highly selective areas	30.8	8.7	27.1
Non-selective schools in other areas	31.8	11.0	30.6
Grammar schools	51.3	44.0	78.0
Mid prior attainment:			
Non-selective schools in highly selective areas	47.6	45.5	74.0
Non-selective schools in other areas	50.2	53.6	79.0
Grammar schools	63.5	84.9	96.8
High prior attainment:			
Non-selective schools in highly selective areas	62.6	81.1	93.2
Non-selective schools in other areas	68.4	89.9	96.6
Grammar schools	77.0	97.1	98.7
All state-funded mainstream schools	49.7	50.7	70.1

¹³³ Department for Education, [Key Stage 4 performance: 2022](#), 20 October 2022 [[custom table](#) created 14 December 2022]

Grammar schools in England

Notes: The small number of pupils with low prior attainment at grammars means that these figures should be treated with caution.

Highly selective areas are local authorities where 25% or more of state-funded secondary places are in grammar schools.

See Box 1 for GCSE attainment measure definitions.

Source: Department for Education, [Key Stage 4 performance: 2022](#), 20 October 2022 [[custom table](#) created 14 December 2022]

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