



**BRIEFING PAPER**

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# Grammar School Statistics

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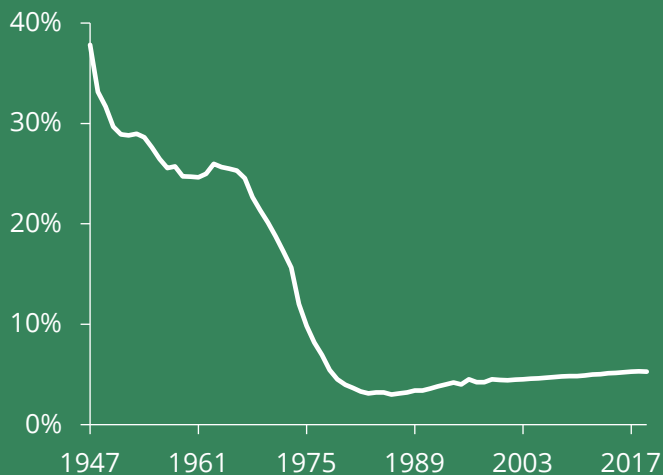
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1. National trends in grammar schools since 1947
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# GRAMMAR SCHOOLS IN ENGLAND

## PROPORTION OF GRAMMAR PUPILS



Notes: England and Wales to 1969, England only thereafter

**The number of state grammars 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.

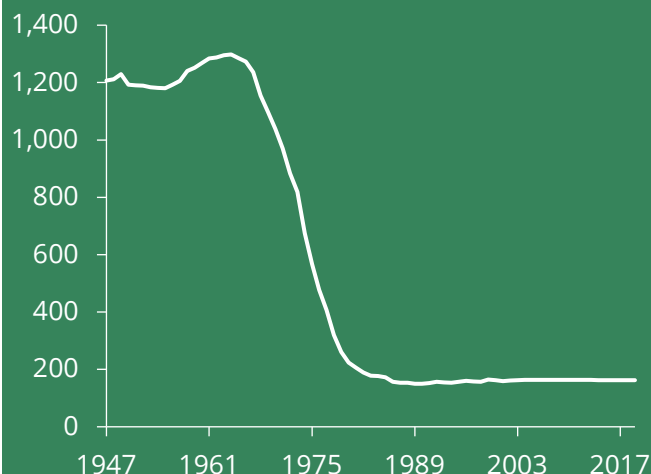
Grammars are unevenly distributed, with 75% of LEA's having no grammars.

**In January 2019 around 176,000 pupils attended 163 grammar schools in England.**

Under the *School Standards and Framework Act 1998* no new maintained grammar school can be opened, and existing schools cannot introduce new selection.

However, there has been a very gradual but steady increase in the proportion of pupils at existing grammar schools over the past 30 years. This is because the average size of grammars has increased.

## NUMBER OF GRAMMAR SCHOOLS



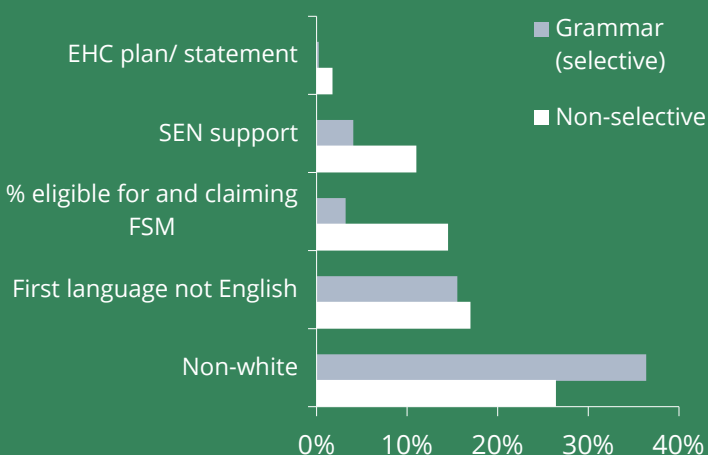
Notes: England and Wales to 1969, England only thereafter

**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. Grammars have a slightly higher proportion of non-white pupils.

## PUPIL CHARACTERISTICS



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# 1. National trends in grammar schools since 1947

## 1.1 Background

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.

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.<sup>1</sup>

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. Before then 'state secondary' education was limited to those pupils who were admitted to aided/maintained grammar schools, and those who attended junior technical colleges and pupils of secondary age in senior departments of elementary schools.

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.

## 1.2 Number of grammars and proportion of pupils attending grammar schools

The charts at the end of this section show the number of state-funded<sup>2</sup> grammar schools in England and Wales, and the proportion of pupils in such schools since 1947.

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).<sup>3</sup> 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.

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

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<sup>1</sup> *Education 1900-1950 The report of the Ministry of Education and the statistics of public education for England and Wales for the year 1950*

<sup>2</sup> These were all maintained until September 2010. Since then many have converted to academies. They are still state funded, but not maintained by their local authority.

<sup>3</sup> England and Wales. B.R. Mitchell, *British Historical Statistics*, Table XV.1

## 4 Grammar School Statistics

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.

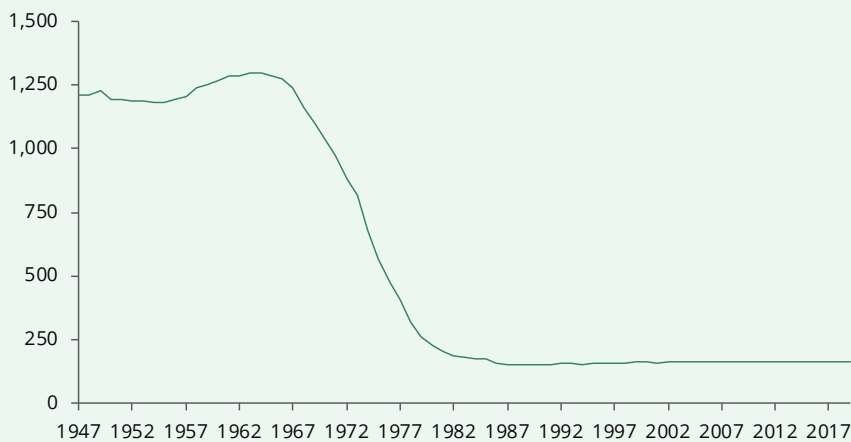
The fastest period of decline in both the number of grammar schools and the proportion of pupils attending grammars was the 1970s. Between 1971 and 1978 650 grammar schools closed. An average of more than 90 per year. The last grammar school in Wales closed in 1988. There was a modest increase in the 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 2013/14<sup>4</sup> reduced it to 163; the first change for a decade.

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. However, there has been a very gradual but steady increase in the number and proportion of pupils at existing grammar schools over the past 30 years. 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 capacity<sup>5</sup>, compared to 15% of all state-funded secondary schools.<sup>6</sup>

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.

### Grammars peaked in 1964 followed by rapid declines in the 1970s

England and Wales



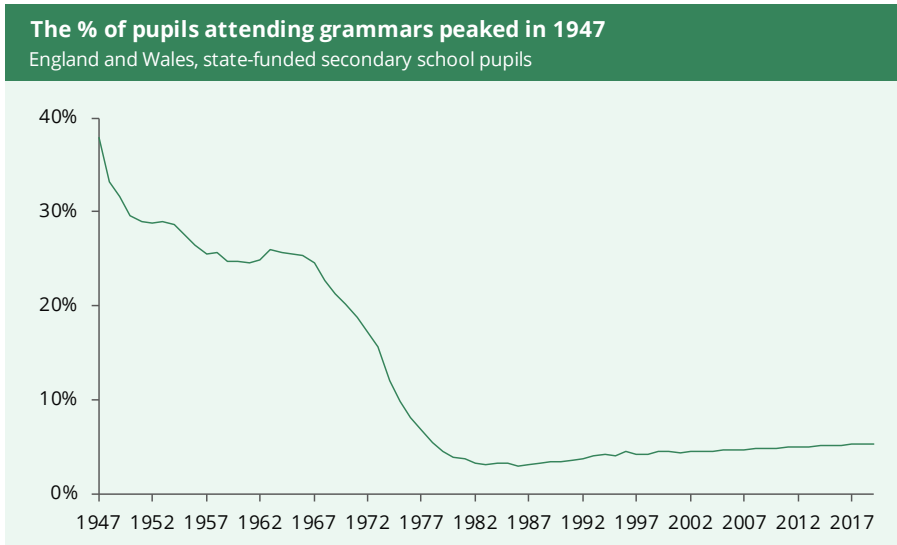
Notes: England and Wales to 1969, England only thereafter. These figures do not include direct-grant grammar schools which continued outside the maintained sector after the 1944 Act.

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

<sup>4</sup> Chatham House Grammar School for Boys and Clarendon House Grammar School

<sup>5</sup> [Get Information About Schools](#), DfE (filtered for state-funded secondary schools with selective admissions policies) [accessed 12 Dec 2019]

<sup>6</sup> [School capacity](#): academic year 2017 to 2018, DfE (Table A3)



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

## 2. Snapshot of grammar schools in 2019

### 2.1 Sub-national statistics

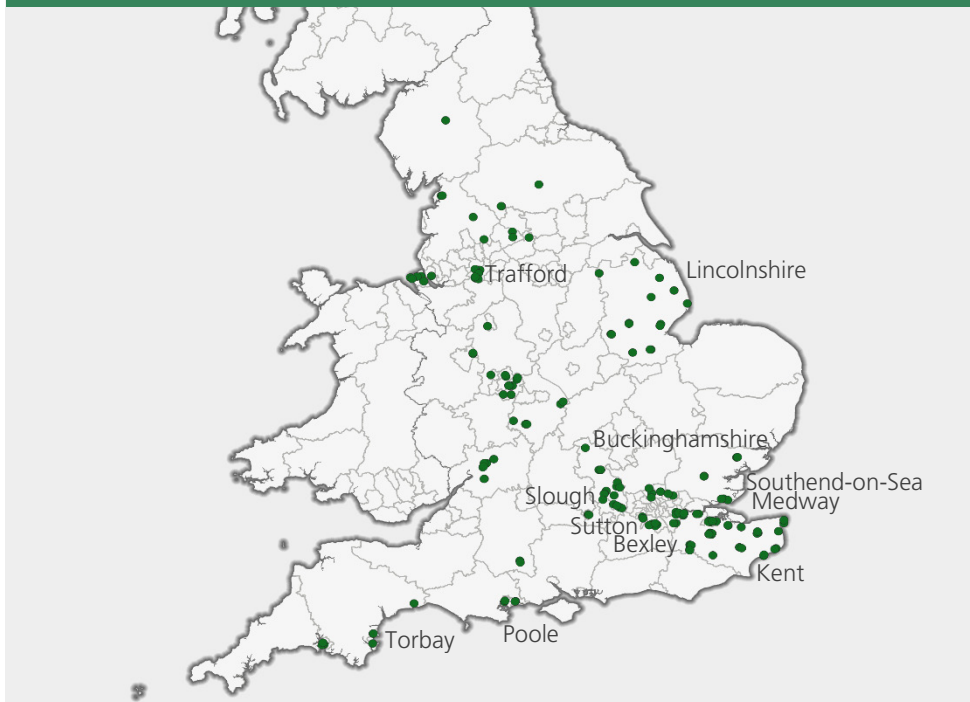
The geographic distribution of grammars is very uneven. At a regional level, in 2019 the South East has the highest proportion of state secondary pupils attending grammar schools with 13%, followed by the South West with 7%. The North East is the only region with no grammar schools.<sup>7</sup>

In January 2019, the Department for Education classified 11 Local Education Authorities (LEAs) out of 152 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).<sup>8</sup> A further 26 have one or more grammar schools in their local area, while 114 (75% of LEAs) have none.

<sup>7</sup> [Schools pupils and their characteristics](#): January 2019, DfE

<sup>8</sup> [Key Stage 4 performance \(revised\)](#): 2018, DfE (Table 2b). There are now 152 LEAs in England.

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



Source  
[Get Information About Schools](#), DfE [accessed December 2019]

## 2.2 Pupil characteristics

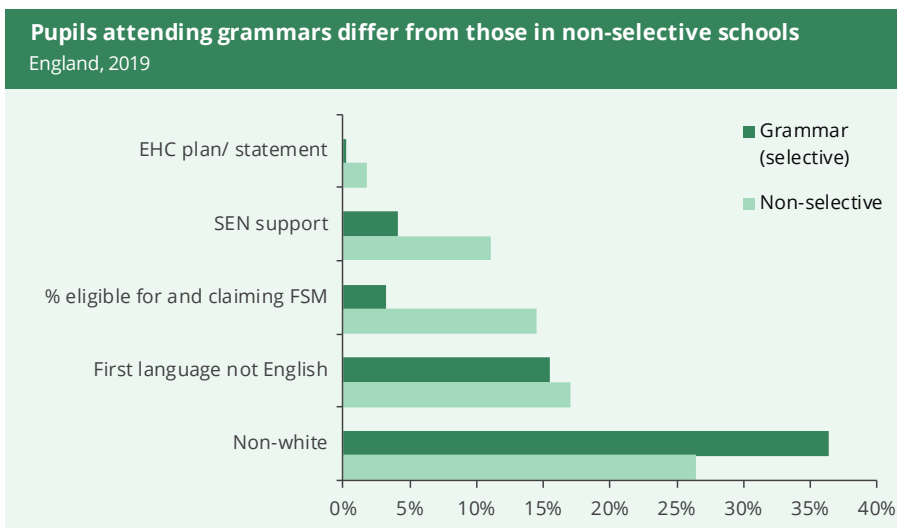
It is not possible to make strictly like for like comparisons with grammar pupil characteristics and national averages. This is because as outlined above grammars are not distributed evenly around the country. A more sophisticated analysis would look at the areas that these schools draw their population 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.<sup>9</sup> Due to the issues outlined above, readers should not give too much weight to small differences.

Pupils at grammar schools are much less likely than pupils at non-selective schools to have SEN support (4% compared to 11%) or be eligible for free school meals (3% compared to 15%). Grammar schools have 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%).

<sup>9</sup> Schools with no published admissions policy are excluded.



## 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 \(underlying data\)](#)

Research for the Sutton Trust in 2016 examined (among other issues) access to grammar schools and found that 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.<sup>10</sup>

In fact, research for the Sutton Trust has shown that “even just looking at high attaining children (those achieving Level 5 at Key Stage 2), FSM pupils are still much less likely to attend grammars than non-disadvantaged children”.<sup>11</sup>

At the other end of the scale, grammar schools reportedly take a relatively large proportion of their pupils from independent preparatory (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.<sup>12</sup> However, this has declined from an estimated rate of 13% in 2013.<sup>13</sup>

### 3. GCSE Attainment

The 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.<sup>14</sup> Please note there are many other possible measures of school performance, which may provide different findings.

<sup>10</sup> [Gaps in Grammar](#): 2016, Sutton Trust (p1-2)

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> [Schools pupils and their characteristics](#): January 2016, DfE (Table 1c and 1a)

<sup>13</sup> [Entry into Grammar Schools for disadvantaged pupils in England](#): 2013, Sutton Trust (p5)

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



The headline GCSE attainment measures show that the differential in attainment is greatest between grammar schools and non-selective schools in highly selective areas, followed by other non-selective schools, and then the national state-funded average.<sup>15</sup>

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. 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).<sup>16</sup> This means that headline results may not give us the most meaningful comparisons.

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

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<sup>15</sup> Idib.

<sup>16</sup> [Revised GCSE and equivalent results in England: 2018, DfE](#) (Table 4b)

## 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  |
| <b><i>State-funded secondary schools</i></b>           |                            |                          |   |
| 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  |

### Note

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

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        |
| <b>State-funded secondary schools</b>           | <b>12.7</b> | <b>44.7</b> | <b>42.6</b> |

### Note

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

Source

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

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