



Grammar school statistics

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Author: Paul Bolton
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This note gives a brief summary of statistics on grammar schools –state schools that select all or virtually all of their pupils by ability. It includes trends in the number and share of pupils at grammar schools since the late 1940s and a snapshot of current grammars. Most of the data are for England only.

The number of state grammar schools peaked at almost 1,300 in the mid-1960s when around one-quarter of all pupils in state secondaries attended grammars. Their number started falling soon after. The fastest period of decline was the 1970s; between 1971 and 1978 650 grammar schools closed. The proportion of pupils in grammars fell to below 20% in the early 1970s, below 10% in the mid-1970s and has been 5% or less from the late 1970s onwards.

There are currently 163 grammar schools in England with a total of 163,000 pupils. These pupils are much less likely to have special education needs or be eligible for free school meals than average. Grammar schools have a slightly higher than average proportion of non-white pupils.

The definition of grammar schools used here is state-funded selective secondary schools. It does not include any data on partially selective schools. Readers may also be interested in the following standard note:

[Education: Historical statistics](#)

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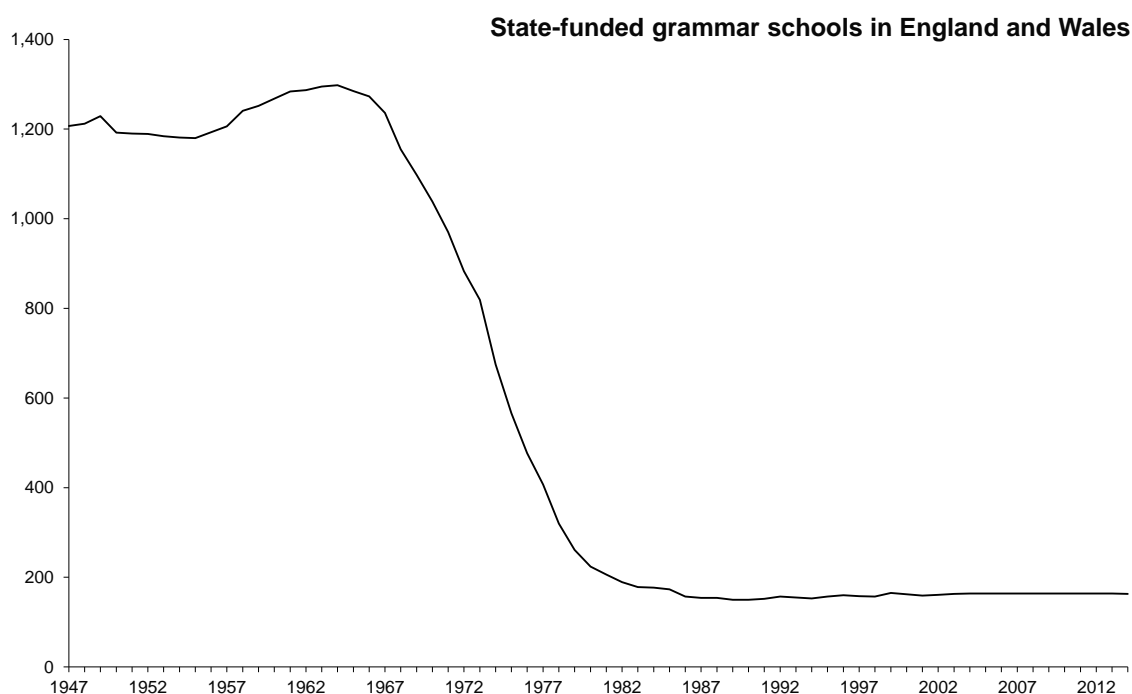
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1 Trends in grammar school numbers and pupils

The *Education Act 1944* made a number of 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.¹

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.

The charts below and the appended Table 1 show the number of state funded² grammar schools in England and Wales and the proportion of pupils in such schools as a percentage of all secondary schools.³ These figures do not include direct grant grammar schools which continued outside the maintained sector after the 1944 Act.⁴

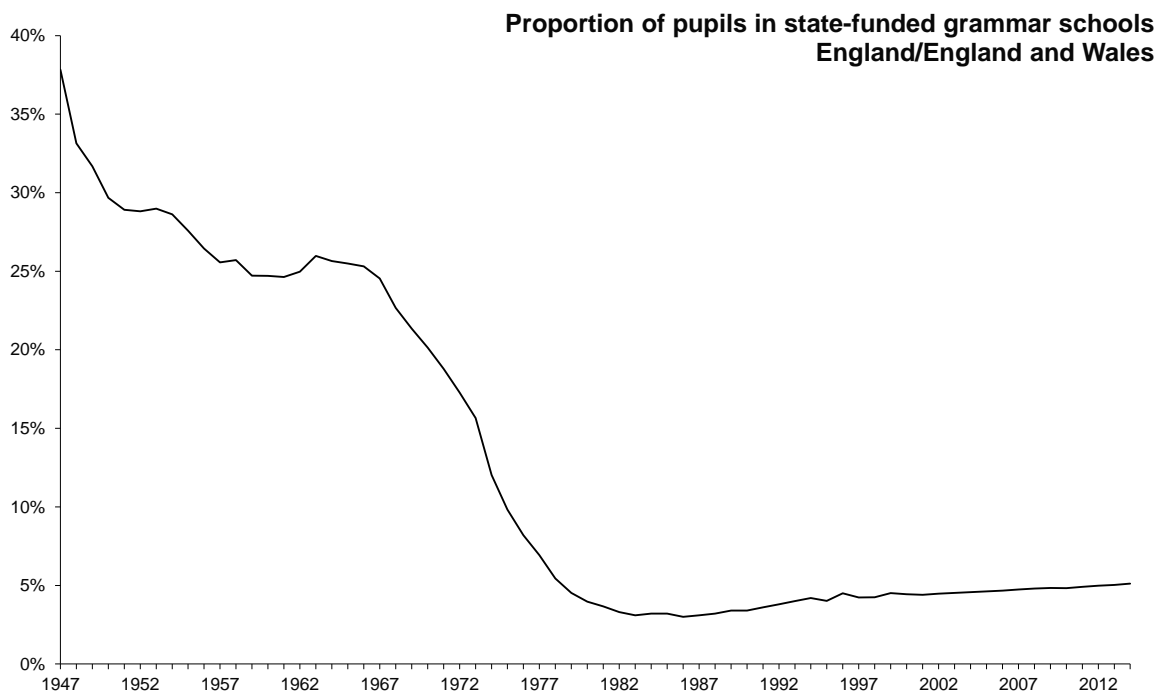


¹ *Education 1900-1950 The report of the Ministry of Education and the statistics of public education for England and Wales for the year 1950*

² These were all maintained schools until September 2010. Since then many have converted to academy status and are therefore still state funded, but not maintained by their local authority.

³ England and Wales to 1969, England only thereafter

⁴ In the mid-1970s these schools were given the option of becoming maintained comprehensives or losing their grant and becoming 'full' independent schools. For those schools that did not opt to join the state sector, their fees were phased out and they were reclassified as independent in 1980.



The number of grammar schools peaked at 1,298 in 1964. The proportion of secondary school pupils in grammars was highest in 1947 at just under 38%. The absolute number of pupils in state grammar schools peaked at 726,000 in 1964.⁵ 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 first) took more time.

The comprehensive school emerged as an experiment in a few areas in the early 1950s. This alternative to the 'tripartite' system increased modestly at first to just over 100 schools in 1959. More rapid expansion in the number of comprehensives and a very clear decline in the number of grammar schools came from 1965 when circular 10/65 was issued by the Ministry of Education encouraging local education authorities to move to non-selective education. Their number went from 1,298 in 1964 to 675 in 1974 and 261 in 1979. The fastest period of decline was the 1970s. Between 1971 and 1978 650 grammar schools closed, an average of more than 90 per year.

The proportion of pupils in grammar schools followed a very similar trend. It fell from 25% in 1965 to below 20% in 1971, below 10% in 1975 and below 5% in 1979. 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/mid 1990s. Their number remained at 164 up to 2013. The merger of two grammars in Kent at the start of 2013/14⁶ took it down 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. There has been a very gradual but steady increase in the number and proportion of pupils at existing grammar schools over the past 25 years as their average size has increased. In May 2013

⁵ England and Wales. B.R. Mitchell, *British Historical Statistics*, Table XV.1

⁶ Chatham House Grammar School for Boys and Clarendon House Grammar School

44% of grammars had more pupils than their stated capacity compared to 16% of other state-funded secondary schools.⁷

The Department for Education classifies ten Local Education Authorities (LEAs), out of the 151 with secondary schools, as having a wholly selective system.⁸ A further 26 have one or more grammar schools in their local area. At a regional level the South East has the highest proportion of state secondary pupils attending grammar schools with 12%, followed by the South West with 6%. The North East is the only region with no grammar schools.⁹

There were 124 schools which were described as secondary moderns in England at the start of 2014/15. Their number has fallen over the past three years. 120 have converted to academy status, but after conversion less than two-thirds described their admissions policy as (secondary) 'modern'.¹⁰

2 Snapshot of grammar schools in 2014

2.1 School characteristics

Grammar schools were more likely to be academies (85% v 55% among all secondary schools), be single sex (74% v 11%) and have a sixth form (100% v 66%). They were less likely to be faith schools (12% v 18%).¹¹

2.2 Pupil intake

Grammar schools are not spread evenly around the country so comparisons with national averages are not strictly like-for-like. A more sophisticated analysis would look at the areas that these schools draw their population from and use this as the comparator. This note uses the secondary modern intake as a proxy for this and gives national averages alongside. However, the fall in schools describing themselves as secondary moderns –linked to academy conversion- means this is a far from perfect proxy. In addition some LEAs have only grammars and comprehensives, so readers should not give too much weight to small differences.

The following chart sets out these comparisons

⁷ *School capacity: academic year 2012 to 2013*, DfE

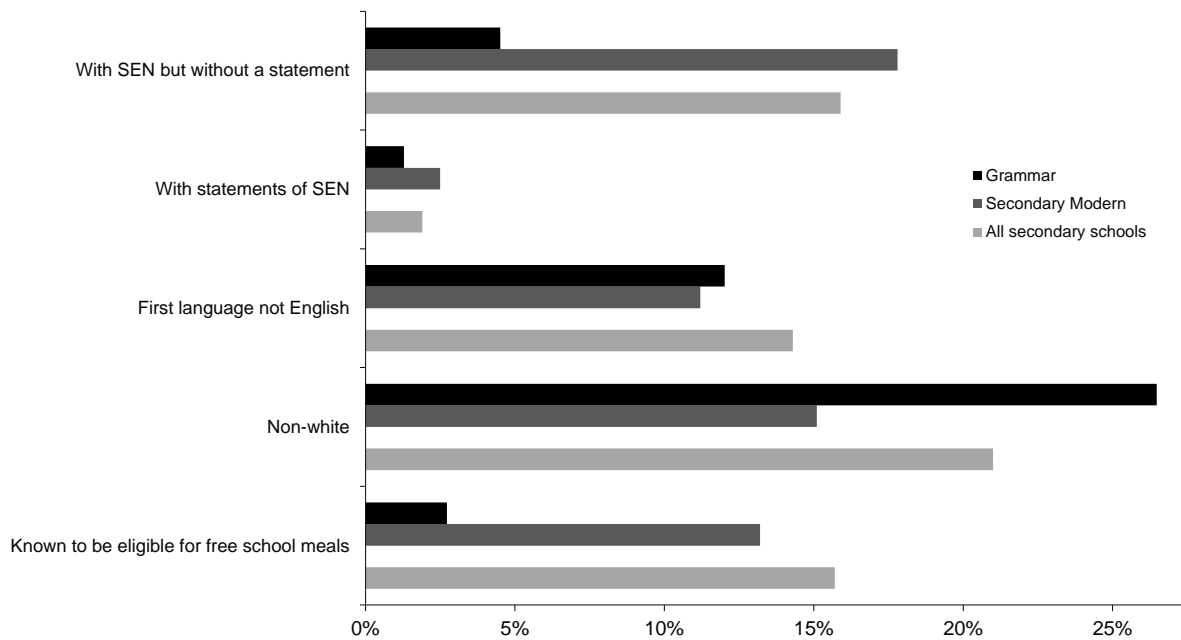
⁸ Bexley, Buckinghamshire, Kent, Lincolnshire, Medway, Slough, Southend-on-Sea, Torbay, Trafford and Sutton. The definition used is that they have a high concentration of selective schools, as set out in the Education (Grammar School Ballots) Regulations 1998.

⁹ *Schools pupils and their characteristics January 2014*, DfE. Table 7c

¹⁰ EduBase (register of educational establishments), DfE. Downloaded October 2014

¹¹ *ibid*

Pupil characteristics by selected school types, January 2014



Source: Edubase and Schools Census, DfE

There was relatively little difference in English as a first language by school type and grammar schools had a considerably higher proportion of non-white pupils than secondary moderns and above the national average. The differences in the other three categories were much greater. The proportion of pupils with Special Educational Needs (SEN) with a statement was less than 0.1% in grammars, 2.5% in secondary modern schools and 1.9% across all schools. The proportion of pupils with SEN, but not sufficiently severe to be stated was 4.5% at grammar schools, 17.8% at secondary modern schools and 15.9% nationally. While one might expect many types of SEN to limit a pupil's performance at an entrance exam, the impact of free school meal status (a proxy for poverty/deprivation) is well recognised, but less direct. The rates were 2.7% at grammars, 13.2% at secondary modern schools and 15.7% across all school types.

In 2008 the (then) Department for Children Schools and Families looked at the intake of grammar schools in comparison to that of their local area. This found that free school meal rates in grammars were not representative of their local areas. They were around one-fifth of the level in their local area in 2007. In addition they also had fewer pupils from the low attaining ethnic groups –Black African, Black Caribbean, Bangladeshi and Pakistani- than their local area. The gap varied somewhat by ethnic group, but was typically around half the rate in their local area in 2007. This study also looked at the level of deprivation affecting children in the areas that different types of schools took their pupils from. In grammar schools in 2007 the proportion of pupils from the least deprived quartile was just over 40%, compared to around 25% in their local area. The proportion of their intake from the most deprived quartile was around 8%, compared to just over 20% in their local area.¹² This [publication](#) also looked at pupil segmentation by local authority and cross-border 'migration' of pupils in the transition to secondary school. Both of which include an analysis of the impact of grammar schools on the relevant local authority results.

¹² *The composition of schools in England*, DCSF (June 2008)

Research for the Sutton Trust in 2008 looked at the ‘social selectivity’¹³ of secondary schools and found that grammars were more socially selective than other schools and that they made up 17 of the top 100 most socially selective secondary schools, but 5% of all secondaries. This general finding should be little surprise given the lower attainment of pupils eligible for free school meals at the end of primary school. However, the report also noted that even among the brightest pupils (in the top quarter of performers at the end of primary school) free school meal rates in grammar schools were 2% compared to 5% across all schools. The authors concluded that grammar schools were enrolling ‘...half as many academically able children from disadvantaged backgrounds as they could do’.¹⁴

Grammar schools reportedly take a relatively large proportion of their pupils from independent preparatory (primary) schools. This rate was reported as 13% in 2007¹⁵ and 15% in 2009.¹⁶ It is not clear which year the underlying data refer to.

3 Exam performance

The table below sets out a selection of attainment results for 2014.

Summary of GCSE achievement by mainstream school type 2013/14

	Number of pupils	Percentage achieving			English Baccalaureate		
		5+ A*-C grades	5+ A*-C inc. English & maths	5+ A*-C GCSEs only	% entered for 5+ GCSEs or equivalent	% entered for all components	% who achieved
Comprehensive	505,568	65.2	55.5	56.8	99.6	38.1	22.7
Selective	22,679	98.8	95.9	95.9	100.00	79.6	70.9
Modern	20,174	59.2	48.9	48.0	99.6	26.8	13.3
All state funded	548,421	66.3	56.9	58.1	99.6	39.4	24.3
Independent	49,499	56.5	28.0	49.3	94.3	16.3	12.6
All mainstream schools	597,920	65.5	54.5	57.4	99.2	37.5	23.3

Source: Provisional GCSE and equivalent results in England: 2013 to 2014, DfE

The differences in headline results are very clear; virtually all pupils in grammar schools achieved five or more good passes at GCSE or equivalent compared to around two-thirds at comprehensives. Gaps are larger when qualifications are restricted to GCSEs only and when the measure has to include English and maths. At least 95% of pupils achieved 5+ GCSEs/equivalent at A*-C in all grammar schools in 2013; all pupils achieved this standard in just over half of grammars in the same year.^{17 18}

¹³ Calculated by comparing the number of children at a school with free school meals with the number of other children on free school meals who live in the same electoral wards as these children, but who attend other schools.

¹⁴ *Social selectivity of state schools and the impact of grammars. A summary and discussion of findings from ‘Evidence on the effects of selective educational systems’ by the Centre for Evaluation and Monitoring at Durham University, Sutton Trust October 2008*

¹⁵ Middle classes ‘buy’ grammar places, The Times Educational Supplement 15 June 2007.

¹⁶ Parents ‘buy’ grammar school places, Daily Telegraph 23 January 2009

¹⁷ The 2013 data are not directly comparable with the 2014 figures. In 2014 the range of vocational qualifications was narrowed and none were allowed to be ‘worth’ more than a full GCSE. For more details and other changes to the GCSE performance data see: [Provisional GCSE and equivalent results in England, 2013 to 2014](#)

¹⁸ DfE performance data

These headline results can be broken down by prior attainment bands of pupils –those assessed below level 4¹⁹ at the end of primary school, those at level 4 and those above level 4. In 2014 89% of pupils taking their GCSEs at grammar schools had been *above* level 4 at the end of primary school compared to 31% at comprehensives and 21% at secondary modern schools. If we only look at this group then attainment at GCSE are predictably much closer. 98% of these pupils who attended grammar schools achieved 5+ GCSEs/equivalent including English and maths, 92% did so who went to comprehensive schools and 90% at secondary moderns. The proportion of these pupils making at least the expected degree of progress in English and maths between the end of primary school and GCSE was noticeably higher at grammar schools at 93% and 96% respectively compared to 84% and 83% at comprehensives and 81% and 80% at secondary moderns.²⁰ It is important however to realise that there is still scope for substantial variation within the ‘above level 4 group’ between different school types. Given that grammars select on ability it is highly likely that these pupils have higher levels of attainment, when finely graded, than the ‘above level 4 group’ at non-selective schools. There are too few pupils who started at grammar school at or below level 4 to provide reliable comparisons with ‘similar’ pupils at other types of school.

4 Background on selection (by Christine Gillie, Social Policy Section)

Grammar schools select their pupils by examination of their high academic ability, usually at 11 plus, and are designated as such under section 104 of the *School Standards and Framework Act 1998*. No new grammar schools may be created but existing grammar schools may continue. Section 39 of the *Education and Inspections Act 2006* re-states section 99 of the 1998 Act. This prohibits any new selection by ability, other than for banding²¹ or for sixth forms. Only grammar schools or schools with partially selective arrangements which already had such arrangements in place during the 1997-98 school year are permitted to continue to use selection by ability, if unchanged since that school year.

Selection on the basis of aptitude is permitted in certain circumstances. Guidance on this is set out in chapter 2 of the *Schools Admissions Code*²². Admission authorities for maintained schools must comply with the Code. Local authorities are the admission authorities for community and voluntary controlled schools, unless the function has been delegated to the school governing body. For foundation schools (including trust schools), voluntary-aided schools and academies, governing bodies are the admission authority.

There are two permitted forms of selection by aptitude. Under section 100 of the *School Standards and Framework Act 1998*, where the school used such selection in 1997-98 and has continued to use it since then without significant changes. And under section 102, where schools may select up to 10% of their intake on the basis of aptitude in their 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.

The designated subjects where specialist schools are able to select by aptitude are:

¹⁹ Level 4 is the expected level of attainment at the end of Key Stage 2.

²⁰ *Provisional GCSE and equivalent results in England, 2013 to 2014*, DfE

²¹ Banding is a method of achieving an intake that reflects the range of abilities of the children applying to a particular school or group of schools, or of children in the local authority or country. It is not a way to select children by high academic ability or aptitude for a particular subject. Banding is permitted by Section 101 of the *School Standards and Framework Act 1998* as amended by Section 54 of the *Education and Inspections Act 2006*. A Department for Children, Schools and Families note provides further information on banding: <http://www.dfes.gov.uk/sacode/docs/Information%20Note%20on%20Banding.doc>

²² <http://www.dfes.gov.uk/sacode/docs/DfES%20Schools%20text%20final.pdf>

- physical education or sport, or one or more sports;
- the performing arts, or any one or more of those arts;
- the visual arts, or any one or more of those arts;
- modern foreign languages, or any such language;
- design and technology, and ICT (but only schools that already selected for those subjects before the 2008 school year may continue to do so).²³

In practice, very few specialist schools select pupils on the basis of aptitude for the specialism.

²³ The relevant subjects are designated in the *The Education (Aptitude for Particular Subjects) Regulations 1999* (SI 1999/258) as amended by SI 2006/3408

Maintained^a grammar schools and pupils in England, 1947 to 2014

January each year	Schools	Percentage of maintained ^a secondary school pupils taught in grammar schools
1947	1,207	37.8
1948	1,212	33.1
1949	1,229	31.7
1950	1,192	29.7
1951	1,190	28.9
1952	1,189	28.8
1953	1,184	29.0
1954	1,181	28.6
1955	1,180	27.6
1956	1,193	26.4
1957	1,206	25.6
1958	1,241	25.7
1959	1,252	24.7
1960	1,268	24.7
1961	1,284	24.6
1962	1,287	25.0
1963	1,295	26.0
1964	1,298	25.7
1965	1,285	25.5
1966	1,273	25.3
1967	1,236	24.5
1968	1,155	22.7
1969	1,098	21.3
1970	1,038	20.1
1971	970	18.8
1972	883	17.3
1973	819	15.7
1974	675	12.0
1975	566	9.8
1976	477	8.2
1977	407	6.9
1978	320	5.4
1979	261	4.5
1980	224	4.0
1981	206	3.7
1982	189	3.3
1983	178	3.1
1984	177	3.2
1985	173	3.2
1986	157	3.0
1987	154	3.1
1988	154	3.2
1989	150	3.4
1990	150	3.4
1991	152	3.6
1992	157	3.8
1993	155	4.0
1994	153	4.2
1995	157	4.0
1996	160	4.5
1997	158	4.2
1998	157	4.2
1999	165	4.5
2000	162	4.4
2001	159	4.4
2002	161	4.5
2003	163	4.5
2004	164	4.6
2005	164	4.6
2006	164	4.7
2007	164	4.7
2008	164	4.8
2009	164	4.8
2010	164	4.8
2011	164	4.9
2012	164	5.0
2013	164	5.0
2014	163	5.1

(a) All state funded schools from 2010

Sources: DIE/DCSF performance data
Schools, pupils and their characteristics: January 2014 (and earlier), DIE
Statistics of education schools in England, various years
HC Deb 15 December 1998 c100w
HC Deb 20 March 1996 c367-8
DIEE