



Grammar school statistics

Standard Note: SN/SG/1398
Last updated: 6 March 2009
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Section: Social & General Statistics

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 over the last 60 years and a snapshot of current grammars. Most of the data are for England only.

Readers may also be interested in the following standard notes:

[Education: Historical statistics](#)
[Variations in GCSE performance 2006/07](#)

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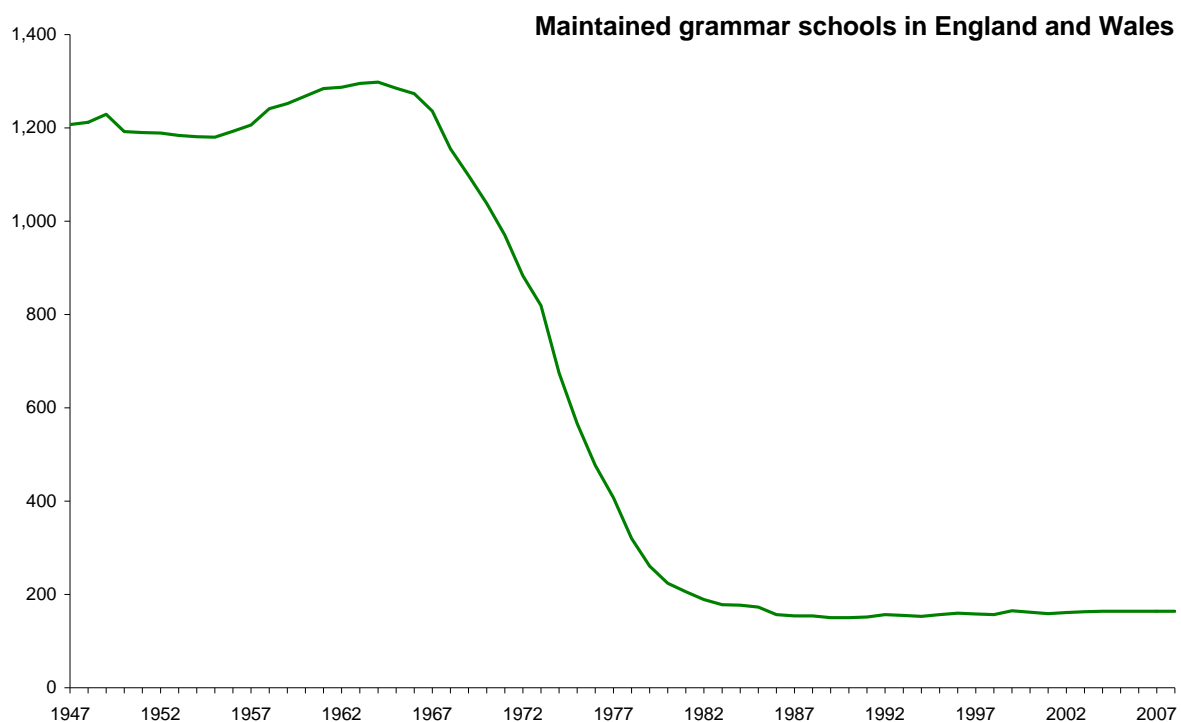
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1 Trends in grammar school numbers and pupils

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 maintained grammar schools in England and Wales and the proportion of pupils in such schools as a percentage of all secondary schools.² These figures do not include direct grant grammar schools which continued outside the maintained sector after the 1944 Act.³

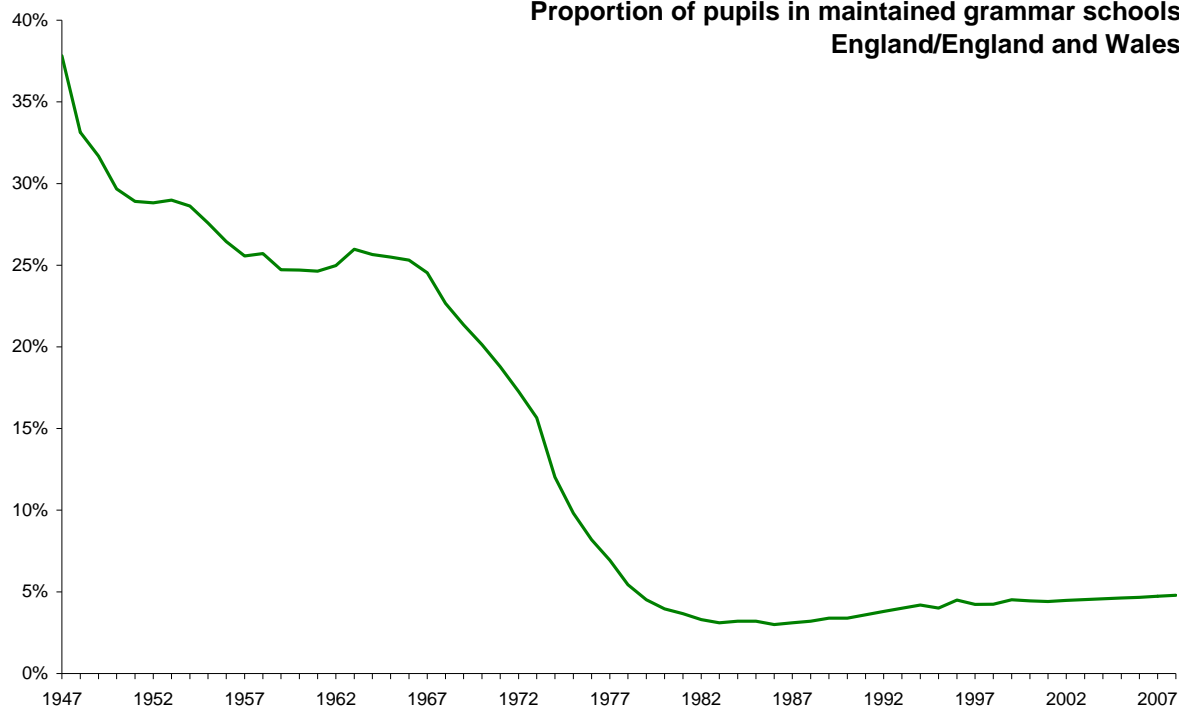


¹ *Education 1900-1950 The report of the Ministry of Education and the statistics of public education for England and Wales for the year 1950*

² England and Wales to 1969, England only thereafter

³ 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.

**Proportion of pupils in maintained grammar schools
England/England and Wales**



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 1964.⁴ The most likely explanation for this is that most grammars existed already and could be filled, while expansion of the secondary modern sector 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 has remained at 164 for a number of years. 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. Therefore, under current legislation, the number of grammar schools cannot increase. There has been a slight increase in the number and proportion of pupils at existing grammar schools as their pupil intake grows.

Seven Local Education Authorities (LEAs)⁵, out of the 149 with secondary schools, have a fully selective system (grammar and secondary modern schools). A further 29 have partially

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

⁵ Trafford, Buckinghamshire, Slough, Torbay, Southend, Kent and Medway.

selective secondary systems (grammars/secondary moderns alongside comprehensives). There are currently 172 secondary modern schools in England.⁶

2 Snapshot of grammar schools in 2008

The attached [spreadsheet](#) lists the 164 current grammar schools alongside their LEA and Parliamentary Constituency.

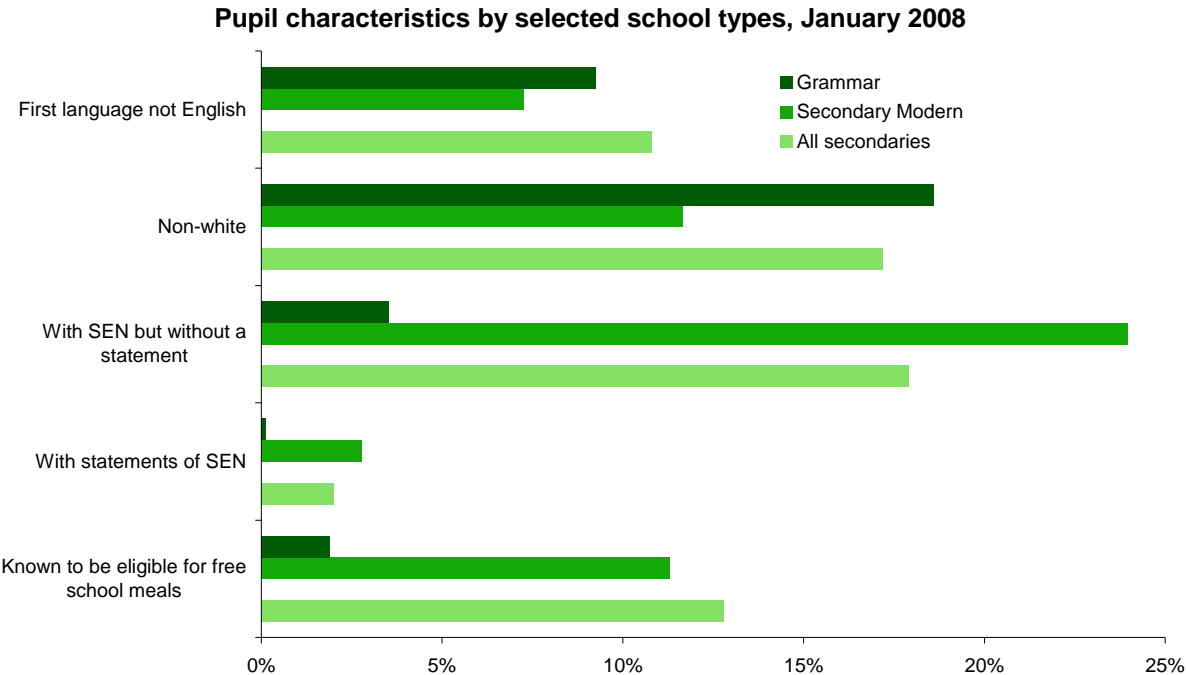
2.1 School characteristics

Grammar schools were more likely to have foundation status (50% v 18% among all secondary schools), be single sex (74% v 13%) and have a sixth form (100% v 58%). They were less likely to be faith schools (13% v 18%).⁷

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. This is not a perfect proxy, as some LEAs have only grammars and comprehensives, so readers should not give too much weight to small differences.

The chart below sets out these comparisons



Source: Edubase and Schools Census, DCSF

There was relatively difference in English language and grammar schools had a higher proportion of non-white pupils than secondary moderns and 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 0.1% in grammars, 2.8% in

⁶ EduBase, register of educational establishments, DCSF. Downloaded February 2008
⁷ *ibid*; DCSF

secondary modern schools and 2.0% across all schools. The proportion of pupils with SEN, but not sufficiently severe to be statemented was 3.5% at grammar schools, 24.0% at secondary modern schools and 17.8% 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 less direct. The rates were 1.9% at grammars, 11.3% at secondary modern schools and 12.8% across all school types.

The Department for Children Schools and Families has 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.⁸ This [publication](#) also looks 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.

Research for the Sutton Trust which looked at the 'social selectivity'⁹ of secondary schools 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'.¹⁰

Grammar schools reportedly take a relatively large proportion of their pupils from independent preparatory (primary) schools. This rate was reported as 13% in 2007¹¹ and 15% in 2009.¹² It is not clear which year the underlying data refer to.

3 Exam performance

Performance by type of school at GCSE is summarised in the note [Variations in GCSE performance 2007/08](#). The table below sets out attainment results. Level 2 is 5+ grades at A*-C or better. Level 2 (E&M) also requires England and maths GCSE at grade C or higher.

⁸ *The composition of schools in England*, DCSF (June 2008)

⁹ 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.

¹⁰ *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

¹¹ Middle classes 'buy' grammar places, *The Times Educational Supplement* 15 June 2007.

¹² Parents 'buy' grammar school places, *Daily Telegraph* 23 January 2009

Summary of GCSE/equivalent achievement by School Type

	Number of pupils	Percentage achieving			% entered for GCSEs or equivalent
		Level 2	Level 2 (E&M)	Any passes	
Comprehensive	536,787	64.4	47.6	99.4	99.9
Selective	22,560	99.0	97.7	100.0	100.0
Modern	27,026	58.4	37.8	99.8	100.0
All Maintained	605,181	63.6	47.6	98.5	99.0
Independent	47,864	86.7	47.5	99.8	99.9
All Schools	653,045	65.3	47.6	98.6	99.1

Notes:

Comprehensive schools include Academies and City Technology Colleges

All maintained includes hospital schools and PRUs

Independent schools included non-maintained special schools

Source: GCSE and Equivalent Results in England, 2007/08 (Revised), DCSF

In 2007/08 only three grammar schools had less than 95% of their pupils reaching level 2 and the lowest score was 92%. Only three had scores of less than 90% on the level 2 measure including English and maths; the lowest score was 68%.

Contextualised Value Added results, which look at the progress made by pupils and adjust for various factors such as SEN and deprivation, show that across the entire secondary age range pupils at grammar schools made slightly more progress than similar pupils nationally, although the difference was less than one grade in one exam per pupil.¹³

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 banding¹⁴ 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*¹⁵. 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.

¹³ GCSE and equivalent results in England 2007/08 (revised), DCSF

¹⁴ 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>

¹⁵ <http://www.dfes.gov.uk/sacode/docs/DfES%20Schools%20text%20final.pdf>

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:

- 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).¹⁶

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

¹⁶ 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 grammar schools and pupils in England/England and Wales, 1947 onwards

January each year

	Schools	Percentage of maintained 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	975	20.1
1971	918	18.8
1972	850	17.3
1973	783	15.7
1974	655	12.0
1975	547	9.8
1976	459	8.2
1977	390	6.9
1978	305	5.4
1979	254	4.5
1980	218	4.0
1981	200	3.7
1982	185	3.3
1983	175	3.1
1984	175	3.2
1985	171	3.2
1986	155	3.0
1987	152	3.1
1988	153	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

Notes: Schools -England and Wales all years. Pupils- England and Wales to 1969, England only thereafter

Data excludes joint grammar/technical schools up to 1955

Sources:

DCSF

Schools and pupils in England: January 2007 (and earlier), DCSF/DIES

Statistics of education schools in England, various years, DIES/DIEE

HC Deb 15 December 1998 c100w

HC Deb 20 March 1996 c367-8

Statistics of education 1969 -volume 1 schools, DES

B.R. Mitchell, British Historical Statistics, Table XV.11