

Poor Grammar

Entry into Grammar Schools for disadvantaged pupils in England

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**Improving
social mobility
through education**



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The Sutton Trust has always recognised the importance of fair school admissions to improving social mobility.

We successfully trialled Open Access – needs-blind admissions – and half the independent day schools have agreed to implement it if state funding were available so that admissions are based on ability rather than ability to pay.

We argue for fairer admissions to comprehensive schools so that the best are not the preserve of the better off. And we also argue that grammar schools should do more to ensure that they provide access to children of all backgrounds who can benefit from a grammar school education.

That is the subject of this important new research, led by Professor Anna Vignoles at the University of Cambridge, with researchers from the Institute for Fiscal Studies, NatCen Social Research and Professor David Jesson at York University.

Their findings are sobering and challenging. Less than three per cent of all pupils going to grammar schools are entitled to free school meals, against an average of 18% in other schools in the areas where they are located. Moreover, over four times as many children are admitted to grammar schools from outside the state sector – largely fee-paying preparatory schools which account for 6% of pupils aged 10 – than children entitled to free school meals.

This picture is one that most grammar schools and supporters of grammar schools should not be happy about. This report is not an attempt to argue the merits or otherwise of selection or the continued role of grammar schools but to determine what can be done to make them open to everyone who can benefit.

Politicians of all parties have accepted that grammar schools are here to stay. While their numbers are not growing, the number of pupils admitted to them has risen over the last two decades. Between 1997 and 2009, Parliamentary Questions show that the number of pupils in grammar schools increased by 30,000 (26%),¹ while research by the House of Commons Library has shown that the proportion of secondary pupils at grammar schools has risen from 4% in 1995 to 5% in 2012.² There have been recent moves to develop satellite grammar school extensions in Kent, which has also announced a new admissions test they believe to be less coachable.

One important factor, which the Sutton Trust has documented in a wider context, is the growing use of private tuition. Nationally, almost a quarter of state school pupils receive private or home tuition, rising to 40% in London.³ Those who can afford to pay for such tuition gladly do so to give their children a head start in the grammar school admission tests.

They do so because the raw GCSE and A level results appear so persuasive: Department for Education data show 68% of grammar school students gained a C or above in the five academic English Baccalaureate subjects (English, Maths, Science, a modern language and history or geography) in 2012 compared with 14.5% in comprehensives, while 28% of grammar school students gained 3As at A level compared with less than 10% in comprehensives and sixth form colleges.⁴

¹ Calculated from <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200506/cmhansrd/vo060710/text/60710w0012.htm> (col 1453w) and <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200809/cmhansrd/cm090624/text/90624w0027.htm> (col 993w)

² www.parliament.uk/briefing-papers/SN01398.pdf

³ <http://www.suttontrust.com/news/news/londoners-most-likely-to-pay-for-extra-tuition-as-demand/>

⁴ Derived from Department for Education performance tables, published January 2013

So, the challenge for the sector and for those areas where a selective system prevails is how to ensure that those grammar schools are open to all, and are not simply the preserve of better off families who can afford private tutors or prep school fees. After all, in contrast to the 2.7% on free school meals in England, grammar schools in Northern Ireland have 7.4% of pupils on free school meals, with a similar overall free school meals entitlement as England.⁵

Also at the Belvedere independent school in Liverpool where for a seven year period all places were available based solely on merit, not money, we ended up with 30% of the girls on free places, 40% on partial fees, and the rest paying full fees. This demonstrated that with excellent outreach, a fair admissions procedure and test preparation for all, and persuading primary schools to encourage their highest achieving pupils to apply, large numbers of low and middle income students gained entry to this outstanding independent school.

That's why our recommendations in this report are so important. We need fairer tests and there should be a minimum of ten hours free or subsidised test preparation for all applicants to provide a more level playing field. We need better outreach from grammar schools, individually and collectively and to look at ways that the admissions powers linked to the Pupil Premium can be used effectively.

We need primary schools in selective areas to encourage their higher achieving pupils to apply, and to work with parents to help them through the process. And, for those high achieving students already in high schools or comprehensives in selective areas, there is room for more partnerships with grammar schools.

When we do research at the Sutton Trust, we often do so with a view to identifying issues where new programmes could help to address them. So, we will look at ways that we can support innovation in improved testing, test preparation, outreach, admissions and collaboration. We will also commission independent analysis of the impact of any such programmes to create an evidence base to enhance fair access to grammar schools.

If state funding were available half of the independent day schools have signed up to Open Access based on the Belvedere model, where entry is based solely on merit not money. In conjunction with Open Access, opening up grammar schools would transform social mobility at the top.

I am very grateful to Jonathan Cribb, David Jesson, Fay Sadro, Luke Sibieta, Amy Skipp and Anna Vignoles for their excellent work on this report. I hope policymakers will act on its findings and recommendations.

Sir Peter Lampl
Chairman of the Sutton Trust and of the Education Endowment Foundation

⁵ In Northern Ireland, 7.4% of pupils at grammar schools are in receipt of free school meals, according to the 2012-13 schools census, compared with 19.1% of all post-primary pupils entitled to free school meals and 27.8% in other secondary schools. This data is derived from the Northern Ireland schools census. See <http://bit.ly/dk9H56>.

Key Findings

1. There are 164 grammar schools in England (2011-12), educating 161,000 students.⁶ About 4% of all Year 7 pupils attend grammar schools nationally, but this rises to more than 25% in selective authorities, particularly Buckinghamshire, Kent, Slough and Trafford. Stand-alone grammar schools often draw large numbers of their pupils from outside their local authority. Two-thirds of pupils at grammar schools in Stoke-on-Trent and Kingston-upon-Thames live in a different authority area.
2. Less than 3% of entrants to grammar schools are entitled to free school meals – an important indicator of social deprivation – whereas almost 13% of entrants come from outside the state sector, largely believed to be fee-paying preparatory schools. The average proportion of pupils entitled to free school meals in selective areas is 18%, and it is higher on average in other areas where grammar schools are located. By contrast, just over 6% of 10-year olds are enrolled in independent fee-paying schools nationally.
3. The research also shows that in local authorities that operate the grammar system, children who are not eligible for free school meals have a much greater chance of attending a grammar school than similarly high achieving children (as measured by their Key Stage 2 test scores) who are eligible for free school meals. For example, in selective local authorities, 66% of children who achieve level 5 in both English and Maths at Key Stage 2 who are not eligible for free school meals go to a grammar school compared with 40% of similarly high achieving children who are eligible for free school meals.
4. The proportion of pupils from non-White backgrounds going to grammar schools is higher than in other schools. These are largely pupils from Asian and Chinese backgrounds, but grammar schools have lower proportions of Black pupils than other schools.
5. Pupils are less likely to attend a grammar school if they attend primary schools with a high proportion of pupils from deprived backgrounds. Pupils attending a primary school with a large number of high-achieving pupils are also less likely to go to a grammar school, perhaps because they under-estimate their own ability.
6. Grammar school heads say that parents from disadvantaged backgrounds often associate their schools with tradition, middle class values and elitism, creating a social rather than an educational barrier that makes them reluctant to send their child to the local grammar.
7. Grammar school head teachers believe that children from more affluent, middle class families are coached to pass the entrance exam. Head teachers favour free or subsidised test preparation sessions for academically able primary school children from less privileged backgrounds.
8. Improved primary school teacher awareness is seen by some grammar school head teachers as important, with primary teachers supporting high achieving disadvantaged pupils in their applications and appeals.

⁶ This figure includes sixth formers and is derived from figures in Bolton, P. (2013) Grammar School Statistics, House of Commons Library, SN/SG/1398, 20 May 2013 showing that 5% of secondary school pupils of all ages are in grammar schools. Throughout this report, the main focus is on Year 7 pupils and their FSM status. They represent around 4% of school pupils in their age group.

9. Some grammar school head teachers spoken to by the researchers believe that the current testing system would benefit from being reformed (as is indeed happening in some areas such as Buckinghamshire and Kent) to ensure that the admissions process does not disadvantage poor students. Some suggested that school admissions should positively discriminate in favour of less advantaged children who pass the entrance exam.
10. Some grammar schools say that they are already undertaking activities designed to improve outreach and to prepare higher achieving students in primary schools with targeted lessons. They are also working to overcome perceptions that they are 'posh' or 'elitist'.

Sutton Trust Recommendations

- 1. Ensure the testing system does not disadvantage pupils from low and middle income backgrounds.**

Grammar schools should carefully assess their testing system to ensure that the 11+ tests they use for selection do not act as a barrier for high achieving students from some social or ethnic communities. Some grammar schools and local authorities are already trying to develop tests which are regularly changed, less susceptible to coaching, intelligence-based and not culturally biased

- 2. Provide a minimum ten hours test preparation for all pupils to provide a more level playing field.**

So long as those who can afford private tutors are paying to ensure their children do well in grammar school tests, it is vital that there is a more level playing field for all applicants. There should be a minimum of ten hours test preparation support provided on a free or subsidised basis to all potential grammar school applicants to help level the playing field.

- 3. Improve outreach work significantly, actively encouraging high achieving students from low and middle income backgrounds to apply.**

Grammar schools should improve their outreach work, providing support and encouragement to children from low and middle income households who have the ability to benefit from their education. This should include providing assurances on access to transport and other costs, and access to test preparation sessions. Grammar schools should actively encourage parents of Pupil Premium pupils whose pupils are likely to pass the 11+ to apply. Grammar schools should do more to work with local media to dispel the view that some parents may hold of them as elitist and encourage successful students from low or middle income backgrounds to act as ambassadors within their communities.

- 4. Schools should consider the merits of powers available in the admissions code to attract high achieving students who are entitled to the Pupil Premium.**

The new school admissions code now allows academies – and most grammar schools are academies - to give preference to pupils eligible for the Pupil Premium. Where they have a free school meals intake significantly below average, grammar schools could therefore consider giving preference to students from low or middle income households who reach a minimum threshold in the admission test. Some grammar schools are already seeking to allow priority to be given to ‘bright’ pupils applying for admission who are in receipt of the Pupil Premium.

- 5. Primary schools could do more to encourage their high achieving children to apply to grammar schools in selective areas, and develop partnerships with grammar schools.**

A common concern in the research was the extent to which primary schools encouraged pupils who are achieving highly at Key Stage 2 to apply to a grammar school, particularly those from low and middle income homes. Primary schools could support pupils who can succeed in local grammar schools to apply, and reassure parents where they may have

Sutton Trust Recommendations

misconceptions about the process. Grammar schools could improve their existing links – some of which are good – with primary schools, helping provide courses for high achieving students, especially those entitled to the Pupil Premium, so that stronger links are built.

6. Build new partnerships with non-selective schools to support their high achieving students

Further partnerships between grammar schools and comprehensives or secondary moderns in their areas could be developed to ensure that high achieving students from low and middle income backgrounds have access to good local teachers in their areas.

The Sutton Trust will also look at ways that we can support innovation in improved testing, test preparation, outreach, admissions and collaboration.

We will also commission independent analysis of the impact of any such programmes to create an evidence base to enhance fair access to grammar schools.

Introduction

Researchers from the Institute for Fiscal Studies (IFS), the University of Cambridge and NatCen Social Research (NatCen), along with David Jesson from the University of York,⁷ were asked by the Sutton Trust to investigate entry into grammar schools by students from more socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds.

The project had three elements:

- an historical perspective of the position of grammar schools with regards to the admission of students from more disadvantaged backgrounds (David Jesson, University of York);
- an assessment of entry into grammar schools for disadvantaged pupils (IFS); and
- interviews with Head teachers about the extent to which primary and grammar schools undertake outreach designed to help more disadvantaged students (NatCen).

These three elements have been pulled together into this summary report. A copy of the full reports for each of the three elements is published on the Sutton Trust website.

⁷ Institute for Fiscal Studies: Jonathan Cribb, Luke Sibeta, Anna Vignoles (University of Cambridge); NatCen Social Research: Amy Skipp, Fay Sadro; University of York: David Jesson

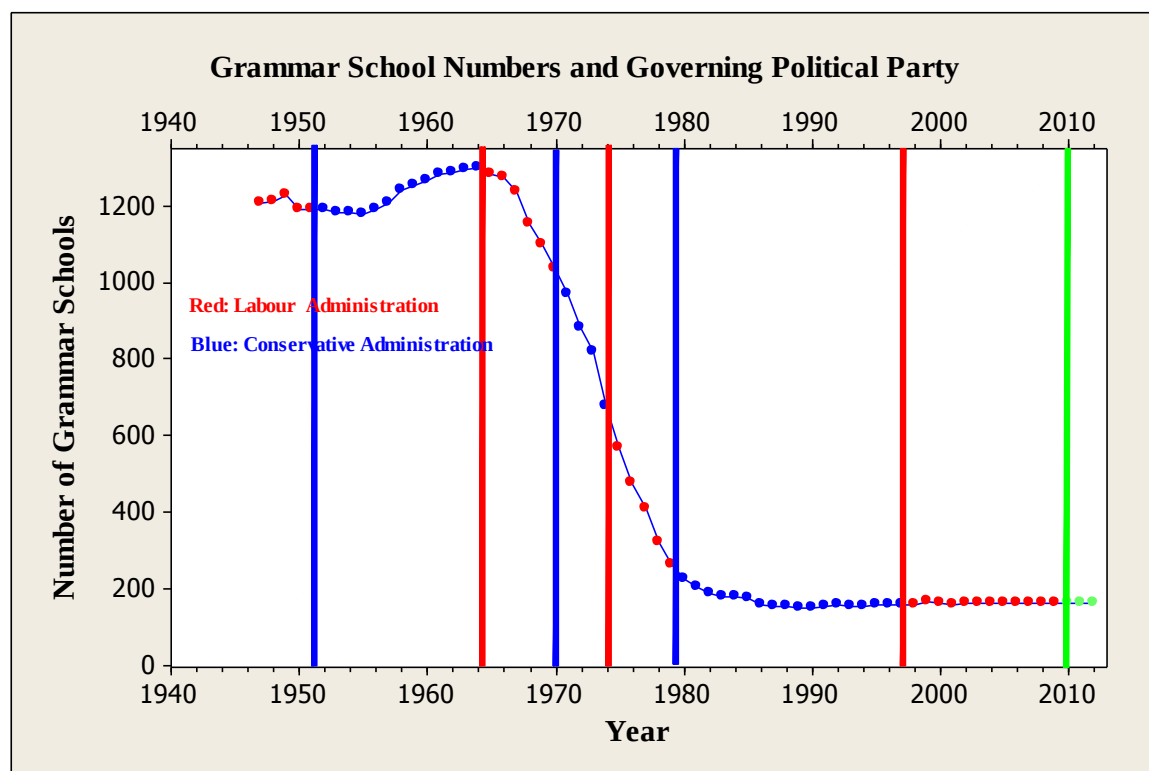
Grammar schools are a longstanding feature of the English education system. From the mid 1940's to the mid 1960's, grammar schools and selection tests for entry into these schools ('the 11+') were the key feature of the education of children in England (and Wales).

Concerns about the under-representation of students from lower socio-economic backgrounds in grammar schools date back to at least the pre-war period. Pupils with professional and managerial class parents have always been over represented in such schools, relative to their proportion in the population as a whole.

The numbers of grammar schools declined sharply from the 1970s onwards, under both Conservative and Labour governments, and stabilised in the early 1980s at around 160 schools (Figure 1). There are now 164 grammar schools in England.

Although few in number, with (in many cases) their historical prestige and their necessarily exclusive selection procedures, grammar schools have come to be seen as the 'destination of choice' for children of many aspirational families. This has led to intense competition for entry into the remaining grammar schools.

Figure 1: Number of grammar schools by the political composition of Government of the day



Data source: Bolton, P. (2013) Grammar School Statistics, House of Commons Library, SN/SG/1398, 20 May 2013.

The role of grammar schools in perpetuating low levels of social mobility in the UK is a highly contested issue. Some view grammar schools as providing a pathway to academic, social and economic advancement of the most academically high achieving students regardless of their social background. Others argue that grammars perpetuate social inequality. In the 1980s, particularly with the publication of the notable 'Black Papers', there was heated opposition to the abolition of

grammar schools and the impact of grammar schools on overall achievement levels has long been debated.^{8,9,10} These issues, whilst important, are not the focus of this report. Instead we discuss the process of entry into grammar schools and the extent to which students from disadvantaged backgrounds access such schools.

Grammar schools themselves are concerned about the extent to which their student intake represents the wider community and a number have recently changed their admissions procedures.

- In Buckinghamshire, 13 grammar schools have withdrawn from the local authority administered selection procedures mainly because they found that too many pupils admitted had been intensively tutored with the result that many other, possibly equally bright, pupils were precluded from entry. These schools have commissioned a new form of selection test which will not be made public (to minimise the influence of tutoring on test outcome). Similar moves are being made by other groups of schools.
- Some grammar schools are seeking to allow priority to be given to 'bright' pupils applying for admission who are in receipt of the Pupil Premium.

Hence from both within and outside the grammar school community there is increasing interest in the extent to which admission to grammar schools is "fair" and open to all academically high achieving students.

⁸ Marks, J., Cox, C., and Pomian-Szednicki, M. (1983) *Standards in English Schools* London NCES.

⁹ Naylor, F. and Peach, R. *The Truth about Grammar Schools*, National Grammar Schools Association.

¹⁰ Coe, R., Jones, K., Searle, J., Kokptsaki, D., Kosnin, A., and Skinner, P. (2008) 'Evidenced on the effects of selective education systems' A Report for The Sutton Trust CEM Centre, University of Durham.

Entry into grammar schools for disadvantaged pupils

Jonathan Cribb, Luke Sibieta (Institute for Fiscal Studies) and Professor Anna Vignoles (University of Cambridge)

We analysed which grammar schools and grammar systems are more likely to admit students who are eligible for free school meals (FSM) and from more deprived socio-economic backgrounds (by taking account of the socio-economic profile of their local area).

To do this we modelled how family background and other pupil characteristics affect the likelihood that a pupil will attend a grammar school. We recognise that poorer students may be both less likely to apply to attend a grammar school and also less likely to pass the test and be admitted if they do apply, but we are not able to distinguish fully between these two mechanisms.

We used two main sources of data: the National Pupil Database and Edubase. Our sample consists of those pupils entering secondary school in September 2009, 2010 and 2011.

We analysed three different groups, as shown in Table 1¹¹

- **Selective Local Authorities** – where 10% or more pupils in the local authority attend a selective school. This represents 106 grammar schools admitting around 15,000 year 7 pupils in September 2011.
- **Stand-alone grammar schools** – where local authorities contain one or more grammar schools, but with fewer than 10% of local pupils attending a selective school. This represents 36 grammar schools admitting around 4,000 year 7 pupils in September 2011.
- **London** – the boroughs of London, of which seven have grammar schools, were analysed separately. This represents 19 grammar schools admitting around 2,800 year 7 pupils in September 2011.

Table 1: Year 7 admissions by type of grammar school

Location	Number of Schools	Year 7 pupil numbers
Selective local authority	106 (66%)	15,000 (68%)
Stand-alone	36 (22%)	4,100 (19%)
London	19 (12%)	2,800 (13%)
Total	161	21,900

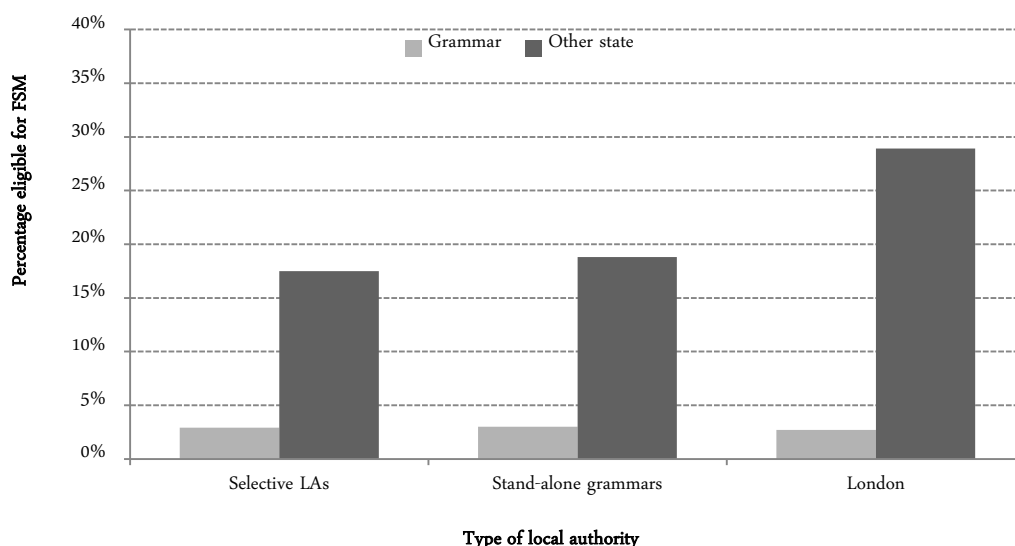
Nationally around 4% of year 7 pupils attended a grammar school in the years 2009–10 to 2011–12. This is naturally much higher in selective local authorities, at 25%. Trafford, Buckinghamshire, Slough and Kent have the largest shares of pupils attending grammar schools.

Stand-alone grammar schools draw in children from a wider geographical area and certainly from beyond their Local Authority (LA) borders. This is also true for London grammars which have very wide catchment areas. For instance, over two thirds of pupils at grammar schools in both Stoke-on-Trent and Kingston-upon-Thames live in a different Local Authority.

¹¹ Only 161 of the 164 grammar schools admit pupils in year 7.

Figure 2, below, shows the proportion of pupils eligible for FSM at grammar and other state-funded schools for the three different local authority types. Across each of these three types of local authority, around 3% of pupils at grammar schools are eligible for FSM. This compares with about 18% at other state-funded schools in selective LAs, 19% in areas where grammar schools are stand-alone and 29% of pupils at non-grammar schools in London.

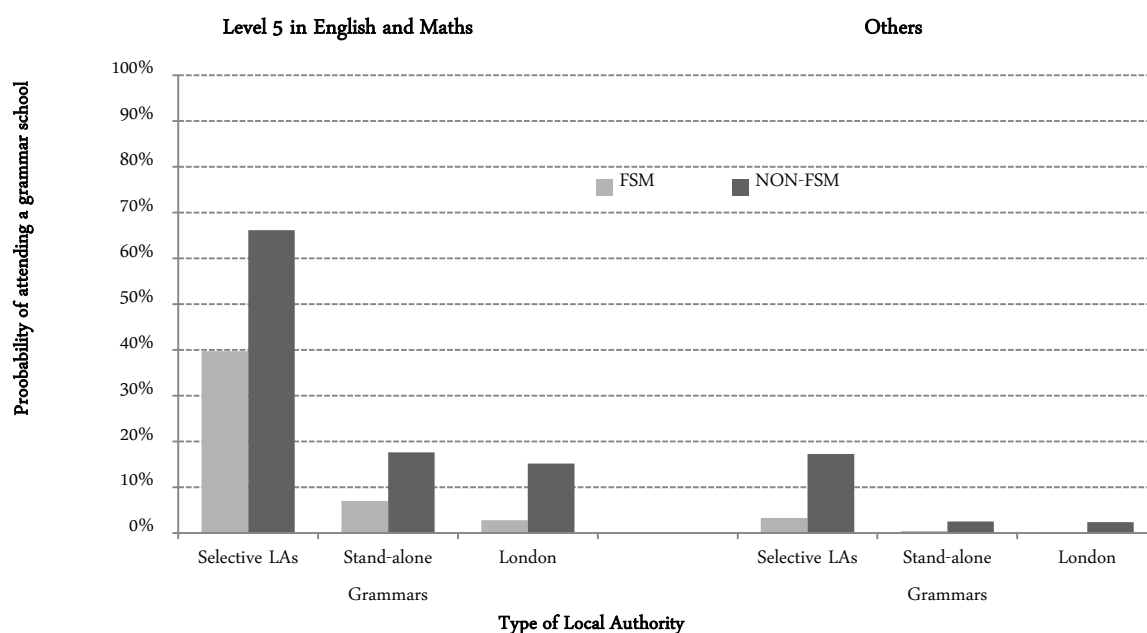
Figure 2. Proportion of year 7 pupils eligible for FSM at grammar and other state-funded schools, 2009–10 to 2011–12



Source: Authors' calculations using the National Pupil Database, 2009-10 to 2011-12.

Our results further indicate that socio-economically disadvantaged students, who are eligible for FSM or who live in poor neighbourhoods, are much less likely to enrol in a grammar school even if they score highly on key stage 2 (KS2) tests. Figure 3 shows the proportion of year 7 pupils attending a grammar school given that they have achieved level 5 in English and Maths at KS2, which is shown separately for pupils eligible and not-eligible for FSM. In selective Local Authorities, high achieving children who are not eligible for FSM have a two-thirds chance of attending a grammar school, compared with only 40% for equally high achieving children who eligible for FSM. These gaps are equally dramatic for other local authority types, though lower in absolute terms as fewer pupils attend grammar schools in these areas.

Figure 3. Proportion of FSM and non-FSM pupils who attend grammar schools, given achievement of KS2 Level 5 in English and Maths, 2009–10 and 2011–12



Source: Authors' calculations using the National Pupil Database, 2009-10 to 2011-12

Achieving Level 5 in KS2 Maths is a better predictor of going to a grammar school than achieving the same level in English, possibly as a result of the type of admission tests used.

The proportion of pupils from non-White backgrounds is higher than in non-Grammars. This is driven by larger numbers of pupils from Asian and Chinese backgrounds, as Grammar schools have lower proportions of pupils from Black backgrounds than other schools.

Clearly the system as a whole needs to improve in terms of ensuring that poor but academically highly able students access the grammar system. The characteristics of pupils' primary schools also seem to be related to their chances of attending a grammar school.

- Pupils have a lower chance of attending a grammar school if they attend primary schools with greater proportions of pupils from deprived backgrounds, with special educational needs or with English as an additional language.
- Students attending a primary school with greater numbers of high achieving pupils actually seem to have a *lower* chance of attending a grammar school. This surprising finding is consistent with theories proposed by educationalists such as Herb Marsh that being with peers who are more academically able causes pupils to have lower academic self-esteem. This could affect the chances of the student applying to a grammar school or indeed doing as well as they might on the admission test.

Perhaps an even more striking result is that at some grammar schools the proportion of children being admitted from outside the state education system is substantial. The most likely explanation is that these pupils are entering grammar schools from the independent sector. Grammar schools may also be admitting pupils from Wales, Scotland or Northern Ireland, or from abroad. However, this is likely to account for only a minority of pupils.

- Just over 6% of 10 year olds are educated in non-state maintained schools,¹² yet 13% of Year 7 grammar school pupils transferred from these (relatively advantaged) schools. This figure is highest for stand-alone grammar schools (15%).
- There is much variation across the country in the proportion of students coming from outside the state system. For instance, more than a quarter of children entering in some local authorities come from outside the state primary system. Over one third of pupils transferred from outside the English state system in Essex, compared with about 7% in North Yorkshire.

This shows that independent fee-paying education may act as one way in which children from higher socioeconomic backgrounds are assisted by their parents to gain admission to a grammar school.

The distance a pupil lives from a grammar school is a potential barrier to access. Even allowing for other characteristics of the pupil and the primary school they attended, those pupils who live further from a grammar school are significantly less likely to gain admission to one. The cost of travelling large distances could be more of a barrier for poorer pupils.

¹² Authors' calculations using "Schools, pupils and their characteristics: January 2013" Department for Education
[\[https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/schools-pupils-and-their-characteristics-january-2013\]](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/schools-pupils-and-their-characteristics-january-2013)

Outreach Activity

Amy Skipp and Fay Sadro, NatCen Social Research

To gain a better understanding of why pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds do or do not go to grammar schools, NatCen researchers interviewed staff from selected primary and grammar schools.

Senior members of staff in five grammar schools were interviewed. These schools were identified from the Institute for Fiscal Studies analysis as having higher than average numbers of disadvantaged year 7 pupils. Similarly, Heads of three primary schools that were statistically shown to have more children accessing grammar schools and children eligible for FSM were interviewed. We asked:

- what grammar school policies and practices help disadvantaged students gain a place;
- what they believed the key barriers were for poor students; and,
- what they thought could be done to promote disadvantaged pupils' access to grammar schools.

Three more interviews were carried out with head teachers of grammar schools put forward by the Grammar School Heads Association (GSHA) as having particularly supportive practices and a strong reputation for actively encouraging pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds.

Educational aspirations

Many head teachers felt that families from disadvantaged backgrounds had lower educational aspirations for their children compared with those from more affluent backgrounds.

Parents in disadvantaged families were also thought to have less knowledge about the grammar school system, and therefore placed less value on what they could offer.

In some schools, a high aspiration culture amongst certain minority ethnic groups, such as some Asian communities, explained the relatively higher number of disadvantaged pupils being admitted into grammar schools.

Perceptions of grammar schools

Head teachers felt that parents from disadvantaged backgrounds often associated grammar schools with tradition, middle class values and elitism. These perceptions created a *social* rather than educational barrier.

Head teachers said that parents from deprived areas were reluctant to send their child to the local grammar – they felt that their children could be out of their depth socially and financially and might struggle interacting with children from more affluent backgrounds.

Case Study: Bishop Wordsworth's Grammar School

Bishop Wordsworth's school in Wiltshire is an example of a Grammar school that is actively trying to increase the social diversity of its intake so that it can serve the whole of its community. Having admitted less than 1% of pupils on free school meals, the school has recently changed its admissions policy to treat children from less advantaged backgrounds more favourably. Since 2012, if a child's parents are in receipt of state benefit and they pass the entrance examination, they are given priority over other applicants.

The School has also started running 'booster classes' for Key Stage 2 pupils in local primary schools. The classes are offered to all children in the catchment area of the school, but families in receipt of state benefit are offered the classes for free and they are prioritised over others if there is a shortage of spaces.

The Headmaster, Dr Stuart Smallwood, said 'Bishop's enjoys a hard earned reputation as one of the finest schools in the country. Academic standards are very high and excellence permeates all other areas of school life too. We want our school to be accessible to all who would benefit from the education we offer and thrive in this environment. This is why changing our admissions policy and undertaking a range of outreach activities with local primary schools has become so important to us. We want our school to be open to pupils from all backgrounds, and so fulfil the primary purpose of grammar schools – to provide a ladder of opportunity enabling children to aspire to and reach the best universities in the world.'

The role of primary schools

Grammar school head teachers felt that primary schools play an important role in encouraging parents from disadvantaged families to consider sending their children to grammar schools.

Some primary schools, however, disagreed with assessment-based entry processes and selective education in general. This may create a barrier for disadvantaged pupils who require additional support from their primary school.

Grammar schools need to build longstanding relationships with their local primary schools in order to be in a position to give parents accurate information about the ethos of the grammar school, its admission procedure and why it might benefit their child.

Some head teachers said that they believed some primary school teachers do not think that grammar schools are suitable for children from poorer families. This view was not expressed in our interviews with primary school staff, although some said that parents might prefer a more 'rounded' education for their child, or that some pupils would not want to attend a grammar school.

The image of grammar schools was felt to be in need of an overhaul. At a time when other secondary schools are competing to attract students, grammars also need to show what they have to offer pupils and prove their appeal to a wide range of students.

The admissions process

Some grammar school heads felt that having a wide catchment area or none at all allowed pupils from more advantaged backgrounds, particularly those attending independent primary schools, to access their school at the expense of local high achieving children.

Reducing the catchment area of the grammar school was thought by some to give more local disadvantaged pupils a greater chance of getting in by reducing competition from affluent families from further afield.

It was widely acknowledged that children from more affluent, middle class families were coached to pass the entrance exam. Views were divided on tutoring; some grammar head teachers did not inherently disagree with tutoring as they thought it could be good examination preparation, others saw it as a barrier that further reduces opportunities for more disadvantaged pupils as parents have to pay for it.

It was felt also that middle class parents are more likely to be aware of the appeals procedure and have the confidence to pursue it. Schools supporting disadvantaged families to pursue an appeal was identified as an important issue.

A number of changes are being considered by grammar schools to address these issues:

- **A review of the current testing system**

Some schools are in favour of producing an 'uncoachable' method of assessment.

- **Overhauling the school admissions policy**

Positively discriminating in favour of children from families in receipt of state benefits who passed the entrance exam over other children was suggested.

- **Free or subsidised coaching sessions**

Providing free or subsidised test coaching for academically high achieving primary school children from poorer backgrounds.

- **Better primary school teacher awareness**

Primary school teachers need to support or make appeals on behalf of high achieving but disadvantaged pupils.

One suggestion was for all higher achieving primary school students to sit the grammar school entrance exam. This would reduce the impact of parental background on the likelihood of applying to a grammar school. It would, however, only work in the selective local authorities and where teachers are committed to promoting attendance at grammars.

Examples of good practice in grammar schools

- **Dispelling the myths.** Grammar school staff take sessions in primary schools and provide information on what their school is like, how it works and the support available.
- **Identifying gifted students.** Grammar schools have also worked closely with primaries in identifying gifted pupils in Year 3 and targeting the parents with the view to building a long term relationship.
- **Engagement activities.** Having dedicated members of staff targeting particular areas of the community and local schools to engage disadvantaged young people. A one-to-one approach with specific families and primary school Heads has helped them to engage with grammar schools.
- **Preparing high achieving students.** Grammar schools provide transport to take academically very able year 6 pupils to the grammar school for targeted lessons, showing what the school has to offer, raising their aspirations and preparing them for the entrance exam.
- **Taster days** specifically targeted at parents from catchment areas.
- **Bridging the gap between the grammar school and the whole community.** Grammar schools organising 'mini festivals' designed to bring together the local community, not just prospective pupils and parents.
- **Changing the image.** Good PR to change the image of the grammar so it is not seen as 'posh' and elitist.

Implications and Conclusions

Grammar schools are over-subscribed, with pupils also travelling longer distances to attend them. A high proportion of students in grammar schools come from outside the local authority, as well as from the independent sector. By contrast, high achieving children from less privileged backgrounds are under-represented in grammar schools.

Head teachers suggested that more needs to be done to encourage less privileged students to apply to grammar schools. Together with primary schools they could do more to support such students, explaining what grammar schools have to offer, encouraging them to apply, helping them prepare for the test and advising them if they need to appeal. Requiring that all high achieving children sit the entrance examination in selective local authorities would also increase the numbers of low and middle income students applying to such schools.

Admissions policies are key to improving the representation of poorer students in grammar schools. If catchment areas are large or open then more affluent parents can afford to travel further and coach their children so that they can access these increasingly selective schools. One suggestion was to reduce the size of the catchment areas to increase participation by local, high achieving but poor students (as they would have fewer students to compete with). However, this might simply increase house prices within the catchment area thereby reducing the chance of poorer parents being able to live in the catchment area in the first place.

Another suggestion made by some of our interviewees was that if a poorer student passes the entrance test they should be given priority. This would be controversial since it would imply that a poorer child who scored appreciably lower on the admission test than a child from a wealthier background would nonetheless secure the place. However, we have already seen that poor high achieving students are far less likely to attend grammar schools than similarly able, richer students, which may suggest that scores on admission tests may not be a particularly accurate measure of ability or academic potential. Nevertheless, proposals for 'positive' discrimination will always be controversial, as has been the case for higher education (HE) admissions. The parallels with HE are clear.

First, high achieving FSM pupils are less likely to go to grammar schools largely because they have lower levels of achievement at age 11. However, it is also true that FSM pupils are less likely to go to grammar schools than those with similar achievement at age 11 but who are not eligible for FSM - a phenomenon that has parallels with the 'Missing 3000' students identified by the Sutton Trust who have excellent A level grades but do not attend elite universities.

Equally, recent research has confirmed that poorer students are less likely to be qualified to gain admission to universities and hence the problem of their underrepresentation in HE is also rooted in the school system. Clearly these issues require work in schools to improve the achievement of poorer students and outreach by universities to encourage students to aspire to go to university and to help them apply. The situation here is similar where work is needed both within primary schools and by grammar schools to tackle the underrepresentation of poorer students in these selective schools.

Some grammar schools are indeed reforming admissions tests and procedures, identifying and supporting gifted poor students in primary schools and undertaking a range of outreach activities.

Evaluating what works and sharing that practice is essential. Our statistical analysis has suggested that it is quite difficult to find examples of primary schools that have had measurable success in ensuring that their poorer but higher achieving year 6 pupils gain admission to a grammar school. It was easier to identify grammar schools undertaking outreach activity, though there is still a need to evaluate whether it actually works before promoting it as best practice. In parallel there is a need to understand the views of parents and children from disadvantaged backgrounds to explore what they see the barriers as being and how these could be addressed.