

**Local
Equal
Excellent**

Supporting fair access to quality
schools for all Bucks children

Who benefits?

Buckinghamshire's 11+ exam and outcomes for children

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compiled by Rebecca Hickman

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Summary

- In 2013, a new 11+ exam was introduced in Buckinghamshire with claims that it would reduce the impact of coaching and therefore be fairer. The same claims have been made to support the introduction of a new exam by the same test provider (CEM) in Kent. Buckinghamshire is a particularly useful area to study the fairness or otherwise of the 11+ exam and outcomes for children from different backgrounds, because unlike in other selective areas, all state school children are automatically entered for the exam.
- In response to evidence released by Local Equal Excellent in 2014 that the 'new' 11+ exam in Bucks had made no difference to patterns of unfairness, The Buckinghamshire Grammar Schools (TBGS) and Buckinghamshire County Council (BCC) maintained that conclusions could not be drawn on the back of one year's evidence. Local Equal Excellent have therefore repeated the data-gathering exercise.
- The evidence suggests that the new 11+ exam has made no difference in addressing the following trends in Bucks, and indeed shows that some trends are getting worse:
 - declining pass rates for Bucks state school pupils
 - a large gap between the average pass rates of the poorer and wealthier areas of Bucks
 - much lower pass rates for children on Free School Meals
 - much higher pass rates for children at private schools
- The sharp rise in the number of non-Bucks children sitting the 11+ exam was largely maintained in the second year of the new exam. Because these children achieve higher than average scores in the exam, their participation continues to raise where the standardised pass boundary falls, meaning that more local children have 'failed' the exam, even though their raw score would have qualified them for a grammar school place in previous years.
- The new exam has been unsuccessful in reducing the large 11+ achievement gap between children from different socio-economic backgrounds. There is no evidence that it has led to greater 'fairness', and indeed figures indicate that the selective system confers a considerable and growing advantage on children from better-off backgrounds, and therefore reinforces existing patterns of disadvantage.
- Therefore, in addition to the growing body of research showing that grammar schools do not contribute overall to social mobility,¹ that their small positive impact on GCSE achievement for some children cannot necessarily be attributed to the fact they are a grammar school,² and that selection depresses achievement for the majority of children across the system,³ there is now further compelling evidence that it is impossible to devise a fair test of ability to be used as the basis for educational separation from age 11 which will not discriminate according to social background and prior opportunity.

¹ Boliver and Swift (2012).

² Coe et al (2008). www.suttontrust.com/public/documents/SuttonTrustFullReportFinal1.pdf

³ Harris and Rose (2013). www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/03054985.2013.776955#.U-jHw_lWSo

Data

- The figures below have been obtained a) from the BCC website, b) from TBGS using Freedom of Information requests, and c) from BCC using Freedom of Information requests.
- The data covers the results of the new 11+ exam in its first two years, 2014 and 2015. Reference to the years '2013', '2014' and '2015' means for entry to secondary school in that year.
- The overall pass rate increased from 30% to 33% between 2014 and 2015 – an increase of 10% – as TBGS sought to adjust for the large number of empty places carried by grammar schools in 2014, after the first year of the new exam.

Table 1: Summary of Bucks 11+ exam results 2013-2015

	September 2013 entry			September 2014 entry			September 2015 entry		
	Registered 121+	Automatic for test	Automatic qualification	Registered 121+	Automatic for test	Automatic qualification	Registered 121+	Automatic for test	Automatic qualification
Buckinghamshire	1393	4995	28%	1271	5248	24%	1362	5431	25%
Aylesbury Vale	307	1648	19%	289	1780	16%	323	1846	17%
Chiltern	420	962	44%	404	1098	37%	457	1085	42%
Wycombe	447	1770	25%	398	1826	22%	376	1886	20%
South Bucks	219	615	36%	180	544	33%	206	614	34%
Non-Bucks	1013	2443	41%	1231	3183	39%	1444	3164	46%
Total	2406	7438	32%	2502	8431	30%	2806	8595	33%

Notes:

- The table shows results for **all** children – state and privately educated.
- Automatic qualification is calculated by dividing the number of number of pupils achieving 121+ only (i.e. pre-appeals) by the total pupils that registered for the test.
- The overall qualification mark is 121.
- 'Registered for test' means the pupil has sat the Transfer test.
- The data is correct as of April 2015 and may be subject to change.

Table 2: Comparison of 11+ pass rates for children from state and private schools

	2014		2015	
	Bucks private schools	Bucks state schools	Bucks private schools	Bucks state schools
Entered	420	4719	433	4972
Passed #	222	930	240	1057
Pass rate #	53%	20%	55%	21%

Pass numbers and rates refer to children who achieved a score of 121+ (i.e. pre-appeals)

Declining pass rates for children at state primary schools

1. Children attending state primary schools continue to perform worse than other children in the 11+ exam. Overall, one in three children passed the 11+ exam in 2015. But only one in five children at Bucks state schools passed.
2. The pass rate of children from Bucks state schools has decreased by two percentage points since the introduction of the new exam. In 2015, this was equivalent to 101 fewer local state school children passing the exam – three extra form groups in an upper school.
3. In 2015, in the thirteen state primary schools in High Wycombe town, only one in eleven children passed the 11+ exam – a dramatic decrease of 26% in their pass rate of the previous year.
4. Children at state schools in Bucks' two least affluent districts, Wycombe District and Aylesbury Vale did worse in 2015 than in 2014, with the gap between their pass rate and the average pass rate increasing.
5. If the pass rate was standardised to ensure that one in three Bucks state school pupils passed the 11+ (i.e. the overall average pass rate), a staggering 600 more children at Bucks state schools would have passed in 2015.

Increasing pass rates for children at private schools

6. In both 2014 and 2015, more than half of children from Bucks private schools who sat the 11+ exam passed.
7. The pass rate of children at Bucks private schools increased by 5% between 2014 and 2015.
8. In both 2014 and 2015, a child from a Bucks private school was over two and a half times more likely to pass the 11+ exam than a child from a Bucks state primary school.

Lower pass rates for children from less affluent areas of Bucks

9. In 2015, there continued to be a considerable difference in the pass rates for children from different Bucks districts. The *spread* of results for the four districts (measured by standard deviation) *increased* in 2015 and was higher than in 2013.
10. For children from the more affluent districts of South Bucks and Chilterns, the pass rates were 33% and 37% respectively in 2014, and 34% and 42% in 2015. For children from the more less affluent districts⁴ of Wycombe and Aylesbury Vale, the pass rates were 22% and 16% respectively in 2014, and 20% and 17% in 2015.
11. The pass rate of children in Wycombe District has declined by 20% since the introduction of the new exam.
12. In all three years, a child from Chiltern District was nearly two and a half times more likely to pass the exam than a child from Aylesbury Vale District.
13. The achievement gap, measured as the difference between children from the highest and lowest performing areas of Bucks, increased by four percentage points between 2014 and 2015.

⁴ www.buckscc.gov.uk/media/601265/economic-deprivation-dec-2012.pdf

Increasing numbers of non-Bucks children sitting and passing the 11+ exam

14. Between 2013 and 2014, the number of children living outside Bucks who registered to sit the 11+ exam increased significantly from 2443 to 3183 – an increase of 740 children or 30% in a single year, significantly outpacing the rise in the number of Bucks children sitting the exam. This rise included a sharp increase in the number of children from the Greater London Authority taking the exam – from 532 in 2013, to 899 in 2014. These trends have been maintained in 2015.
15. The gap between the 11+ pass rate for Bucks and non-Bucks children has grown significantly since the introduction of the new exam. The gap was 13 percentage points in 2013, rising to 15 percentage points in 2014, and shooting up to 21 percentage points in 2015.
16. Because non-Bucks children achieve much higher than average scores, they have a significant impact on whether Bucks children get a grammar school place or not. This is because the 121 pass mark is not fixed, but standardised according to the results of that year's cohort. The effect of this is that in 2014 and 2015, more Bucks children have 'failed' the exam, even though even though their raw score would have qualified them for a grammar school place in previous years.
17. However, while the participation of many non-Bucks children changes where the 11+ pass mark falls, many of these same children then opt to go to a local school, leaving large numbers of empty places in Bucks grammar schools at the same time as more local children than ever are being turned away.

Diversity and Free School Meals

18. A report for TBGS by CEM, shows that in 2014, children receiving free school meals (FSM) had an extremely low pass rate, of only 4%. The report further finds that children who speak English as a second language (ESL) did significantly worse in the 11+ exam than English first language speakers. ESL boys achieved an overall pass rate of only 14.5%. The report highlights that 'ESL candidates mean scores were lowest for Verbal, whereas non-ESL scores were highest for Verbal'. The verbal reasoning section of the paper is worth 50% of the overall mark. The ongoing inclusion of verbal reasoning in the exam is therefore likely to prejudice the chances of ESL children.
19. TBGS is a non-profit company and is therefore not obliged to meet the requirements of the Public Sector Equality Duty.
16. School by school comparisons also highlight grammar schools' failure to serve their local communities:
 - John Hampden Grammar School is only one mile away from Cressex Community School (a non-grammar). However, in 2014, 65% of Cressex's intake was of Pakistani heritage, compared to only 4% of John Hampden Grammar School's intake.
 - The Royal Grammar School and Highcrest Academy (non-grammar) are also about one mile apart. In their 2014 intake, the RGS had 4 children on FSM, while Highcrest has 49 children on FSM.

***Local Equal Excellent* is a local group supporting fair access to quality schools for all Bucks children. Please inbox us at www.facebook.com/localegualexcellent to receive the raw datasets on which this report is based.**