

Buckinghamshire's 11+ exam and ethnic bias

- In 2013, a new 11+ exam was introduced in Buckinghamshire with claims that it would reduce the impact of coaching and therefore be fairer. Under FOI, The Buckinghamshire Grammar Schools (TBGS) provided data on the ethnicity of all Bucks state school pupils who took the 11+ exam for 2014 and 2015 entry (nearly 5000 children in total each year). **The data shows unequivocally that the selective system in Bucks is underpinned by clear and substantial bias against children from certain ethnic groups.**
- After White British, by far the largest ethnic group in these two cohorts was Pakistani. Children from Pakistani backgrounds made up 11% of the cohort in both years, compared to the next largest group, children of Indian heritage, who were less than 3% of the cohort.
- In both years, **children from Pakistani backgrounds performed significantly worse in the exam than the majority of other children, and were only half as likely to pass as White British children.** The average test score of children from Pakistani background was 18 points lower than White British children in 2014, and 19 points lower in 2015.

Ethnic group	Pass rate (121+)		Average standardised test score	
	2014	2015	2014	2015
White British	19.4%	21.1%	90	89
Pakistani	8.6%	10.9%	72	70

- 121 is the standardised score required to automatically qualify for a grammar school place.
- The table shows the 11+ results for Bucks state school pupils.

- Compared to White British children, average test scores in both years were also substantially lower for children from Black Caribbean (-31 points, -21 points), Black African (-14 points, -14 points), Mixed White-Black Caribbean (-18 points, -16 points) and Mixed White-Black African (-11 points, -10 points) backgrounds. In 2014, of the 40 children from Black Caribbean background who sat the 11+ exam, not a single child passed.
- **Crucially, the bias against children from certain ethnic backgrounds, is also against *high ability* children from these backgrounds.** A report provided by the test provider (Centre for Evaluation and Monitoring, CEM, at Durham University) in response to a FOI request, cites three Bucks primary schools where nearly all of the children are from Pakistani background. At these schools, 46 children were categorised as 'high attainers' according to their KS2 results, but only seven of these children passed the 11+.
- **The same report reveals that the largest section of the exam (Verbal Ability – 50% of final mark) shows the greatest bias against children from Pakistani background.** It also shows that the smallest section of the exam (Non-Verbal Ability – 20%) has the least bias

to both children from different ethnic backgrounds and children from low-income homes. Yet when challenged on this, The Buckinghamshire Grammar Schools stated that they have no plans to change the weightings of the exam components to produce more equal outcomes for children from different backgrounds.

- School by school comparisons also show that Buckinghamshire grammar schools are continuing to fail to serve their local communities and that **schools in diverse areas like High Wycombe are being divided along racial lines:**
 - Wycombe High School and John Hampden Grammar School are only one mile away from Cressex Community School (a non-grammar). However, according to the 2015 school census, 60% of Cressex's pupils are of Pakistani heritage, compared to 14% of Wycombe High School's pupils and only 7% of John Hampden Grammar School's.
 - In 2015, Highcrest Academy (a non-grammar) had five times the number of children from Black Caribbean and Mixed White-Black Caribbean heritage than the Royal Grammar School less than one mile way (82 pupils vs 16 pupils), despite having only two-thirds the total number of pupils.
- Data on free school meal (FSM) eligibility shows that BME disadvantage is distinct from socio-economic disadvantage in that the former does not disappear when the latter is controlled for. In fact, BME disadvantage is very pronounced among those not eligible for free school meals, indicating that **it is not the case that BME pupils have lower scores than their White British peers simply because more of them are from poorer homes.**
- CEM stated in a marketing brochure that their test is 'designed to enable the selection of candidates based on **natural ability**'. For this statement to be true and in the light of the data that has now been published, both **CEM and TBGS either must believe that children from some ethnic backgrounds have more/less 'natural ability' than children from other ethnic backgrounds OR must realise that their 11+ exam is failing to do what it claims to do.** As a result of pressure from Local Equal Excellent, on 10th May 2016, CEM announced that they were withdrawing the brochure to review its contents.
- The available data suggests that the Bucks 11+ exam is failing to select on the basis of aptitude or academic potential, but instead shows significant bias against children from certain backgrounds. The exam has serious and far-reaching implications for thousands of children every year but creates a secondary school system that is predicated on unfairness. **Until and unless there is evidence that ethnicity and socio-economic status play no part in determining 11+ outcomes, the test should be withdrawn and Buckinghamshire grammar schools should admit local children of all abilities.**

To receive the full datasets on which this briefing is based, please inbox us at our Facebook address below and include your email address.

Local Equal Excellent is a local group supporting fair access to quality schools for all Bucks children: www.facebook.com/localequalexcellent

Summary of 11+ exam results of Buckinghamshire state school pupils from different ethnic groups in 2014 and 2015

	All		White British		Pakistani		Indian		Black Caribbean		Mixed White-Black Caribbean		Black African		Mixed White-Black African		Mixed White-Asian	
	2014	2015	2014	2015	2014	2015	2014	2015	2014	2015	2014	2015	2014	2015	2014	2015	2014	2015
Bucks state	4780	4943	3371	3407	523	530	132	143	40	47	101	94	41	51	21	26	90	101
No. 121+	933	1064	655	718	45	58	76	80	0	6	5	14	7	9	2	3	28	46
Bucks pass rate	19.5%	21.5%	19.4%	21.1%	8.6%	10.9%	57.6%	55.9%	0.0%	12.8%	5.0%	14.9%	17.1%	17.6%	9.5%	11.5%	31.1%	45.5%
% point difference from mean	0	0	0	0	11	11	-38	-34	20	9	15	7	2	4	10	10	-12	-24
Bucks ave STTS	89	87	90	89	72	70	122	116	59	68	72	73	76	75	79	79	100	106
Bucks ave VER	45	45	47	46	36	35	62	57	32	36	37	38	39	40	41	40	51	54
Bucks ave MAT	26	26	26	26	23	21	37	36	17	20	21	22	22	22	24	23	29	32
Bucks ave NVR	18	18	18	18	15	14	24	23	11	13	14	15	14	14	15	17	20	21
STTS difference from average White British	-1	-2	0	0	-18	-19	32	27	-31	-21	-18	-16	-14	-14	-11	-10	10	17

All data provided by The Buckinghamshire Grammar Schools.