

The new 11+ exam: Questions for The Buckinghamshire Grammar Schools

- 1. What analysis have The Buckinghamshire Grammar Schools (TBGS) made of the performance of children from less advantaged backgrounds in the new 11+ exam? What steps are they taking to address any emerging issues?**

The data* shows that the new 11+ exam has made no impact on the following trends:

- much higher pass rates for children living in more affluent districts
- much lower pass rates for children on Free School Meals
- much higher pass rates for children at private schools

The results of the 2014 and 2015 exams show that the gap between the achievement of children from the more and least affluent districts in Bucks has increased. A child from Chiltern District is two and a half times more likely to pass the exam than a child from Aylesbury Vale District.

In addition, children attending state primary schools in High Wycombe and Aylesbury, are doing much worse than other Bucks children in the 11+ exam. Overall, one out of every four Bucks children who took the exam for 2014 entry passed. However, only one in eight children attending primary schools in High Wycombe town passed, and fewer than one in ten children attending primary schools in Aylesbury town passed.

A report for TBGS by the test developer, CEM, shows that in 2014, children receiving free school meals (FSM) had an extremely low pass rate, only 4%. The impact of this is starkly illustrated by a local example: The Royal Grammar School and Highcrest Academy are less than a mile apart; but provisional data indicated that in their 2014 intake, the RGS received 4 children on FSM, while Highcrest received 49 children on FSM.

The final data for 2014 indicates that a child from a Bucks private school is over three times more likely to pass the 11+ exam than a child from a Bucks state primary school.

- 2. What analysis have TBGS made of the 11+ performance of children from different black and minority ethnic (BAME) groups and who speak English as an additional language? What steps are they taking to address any emerging issues?**

Data collected from eight High Wycombe secondary schools indicates that the new 11+ exam has made no impact on the low pass rates for children of Pakistani and Black Caribbean heritage.

A report for TBGS by CEM shows that in 2014, 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 also 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 continue to prejudice the chances of ESL children.

TBGS have collected extensive data on the ethnicity of pupils sitting the 11+ exam but have not published an analysis of this data. TBGS appear unwilling to undertake a proper evaluation of the impact of the new exam on children from BAME backgrounds, and as such are failing to carry out their responsibilities under the Public Sector Equality Duty and the School Admissions Code.

Paragraph 1.31 of the School Admissions Code states:

Tests for all forms of selection must be clear, objective, and give an accurate reflection of the child's ability or aptitude, irrespective of sex, race, or disability.

3. Under what circumstances should an unfair set of outcomes under the new 11+ exam in any single year not be treated as meaningful?

In the light of the worrying trends emerging, TBGS appear to be trying to argue that nothing can be concluded from only two years' results. However, if a set of outcomes in any single year are unfair, they are unfair. Their impact is felt just as harshly by the children who lost out, whether or not those outcomes are the same the next year. In this case, we have *two years'* results pointing to the same worrying trends.

At present, TBGS's untenable position seems to be that there is no data that they would accept as indicating that the new exam may be discriminating against some children. If this is not the case, they should make clear what kind of data they believe would indicate a potential problem at this stage.

4. Based on the results of the first two years, what clear evidence can TBGS point to that shows that the new 11+ exam is more resistant to coaching?

All of the trends outlined in question 1 above suggest that more affluent parents are still able to gain advantage for their children in the 11+ exam, and this is likely to be due in significant part to coaching. TBGS have not attempted to present any proof to support their claim that 'the new tests are less susceptible to the impact of specific test tutoring'. This assertion seems to rest on anecdotal evidence at best, with no basis in the data.

5. Why in TBGS's view did the number of successful appeals increase by 54% in a single year?

The number of successful reviews jumped from 224 to 344 between 2013 and 2014, an increase of 54% in a single year. This figure includes 48 children who scored 10 marks or more lower than the 121 pass mark. This is a strong indicator that the new exam had been less, not more, effective than the old exam in identifying what the grammar schools themselves define as 'ability'.

6. Why did TBGS not act on the concerns raised in BCC's Due Diligence report that the new exam would discriminate against certain groups of children?

BCC officers raised clear concerns in their Due Diligence report on the exam provider, the Centre for Evaluation and Monitoring (see in particular page 13). BCC have stated that they shared this report with TBGS. Yet in response to an FOI request, TBGS stated that the report was only for BCC purposes and they took no action to follow up on the concerns.

7. What assessment have TBGS made of the impact of the sharp rise in the number of non-Bucks children sitting and passing the 11+ exam on local children's chances of passing the exam?

In 2014 and 2015, there was a steep rise in the number of non-Bucks children sitting the 11+ exam. While the average pass rate for children from Bucks is 25%, the pass rate for non-Bucks children was 39% for 2014 entry, and 46% for 2015 entry. This has a significant impact on where the pass boundary falls. This is because the 121 pass mark is not fixed, but standardised each year according to the performance of that year's cohort. The effect of this is that in 2014 and 2015, more local children have 'failed' the exam, even though many would have passed in previous years.

As more grammar school places are taken by non-Bucks children, more upper school places must be found for the local children who have missed out. At the same time, in 2014, grammar schools including John Hampden, Chesham Grammar and Aylesbury High are carrying large numbers of empty Year 7 places.

8. Do TBGS believe that parents are entitled to full access to all relevant information and data relating to the new 11+ exam? Do they support the continuing refusal of the Centre for Evaluation and Monitoring to release their pilot test data on the new 11+ exam?

TBGS took over eight months to release the full 2014 results and only released the data last week under pressure from the Information Commissioner. CEM at Durham University (who developed and deliver the new exam) continue to refuse to publish the full pilot test data or analysis which they have used as the basis for their repeated claims that the new exam would be fairer and more resistant to tutoring.

TBGS spent £77,000 from local school budgets on developing the new 11+ exam. Most of this was paid to CEM. TBGS have spent a further £295,000 of taxpayers' money on delivering the 2014 exam, with CEM being paid £155,000.

The 'Who Benefits' report provides a full summary of the official 2014 and 2015 11+ exam results and can be accessed at <http://bit.ly/bucksselection>

www.facebook.com/localequalexcellent

* The datasets on which this briefing is based can be accessed at:

www.bucksc.gov.uk/education/schools/admissions-and-moving-school/policy-hub/

Summary of Bucks 11+ exam results 2013-2015

All data supplied by The Buckinghamshire Grammar Schools

	September 2013 entry			September 2014 entry			September 2015 entry		
	121+	Registered for test	Automatic qualification ¹	121+	Registered for test	Automatic qualification ¹	121+	Registered for test	Automatic qualification ¹
Buckinghamshire	1393	4995	28%	1271	5248	24%	1344	5404	25%
Aylesbury Vale	307	1648	19%	289	1780	16%	320	1838	17%
Chiltern	420	962	44%	404	1098	37%	452	1074	42%
Wycombe	447	1770	25%	398	1826	22%	368	1882	20%
South Bucks	219	615	36%	180	544	33%	204	610	33%
Non-Bucks	1013	2443	41%	1231	3183	39%	1439	3149	46%
Total	2406	7438	32%	2502	8431	30%	2783	8553	33%

¹ Automatic qualification is calculated by dividing the number of number of pupils achieving 121+ only (not including selection reviews) by the total pupils that registered for the test

Notes:

- Aylesbury Vale and Wycombe both refer to the districts, which cover much larger areas than the respective towns of Aylesbury and High Wycombe.
- The overall qualification mark is 121.
- 'Registered for test' means the pupil has sat the Transfer test.
- The 2015 data is provisional and may be subject to change.