

# *History in Schools- A School Report*



*Chris Skidmore MP*

## Author

Prior to becoming an MP, Chris Skidmore taught at Bristol University where he is now a Research Fellow in History. His previous books include a biography of Edward VI and *Death and the Virgin*, a study of Elizabeth I's early years on the throne. Chris is also the Vice-Chairman of the All Party Parliamentary Group on History and Archives.

## Introduction

The proportion of pupils taking History GCSE in schools has reached an all-time low.

For the last year for which figures are currently available, 2010, just 29.9% of pupils in Comprehensive schools were entered for History- compared to 36.3% in 1997. (Hansard 20 July 2011 : Column 1041W)

What is worrying, however, is the educational divide opening up within our schools, and indeed the nation. History GCSE is increasingly becoming marginalised, and in some schools forgotten entirely. This report demonstrates how the study of History, a subject which should unite us as one nation, has now become the subject of two nations. In entire communities and schools, often in some of the most deprived areas of the country, the study of history has been shunned; elsewhere, it has become the preserve of more affluent areas and schools. This cannot be healthy for the future of the nation- indeed, for our own national identity; we must seek to end the current situation where two worlds can sit side by side, not understanding our common history and shared values. History has a crucial role to play in defining these, and more must be done to transform and reinvigorate the study of a subject so vital to our national identity.

This report aims to expose the current, and worsening, problem with History in schools today, so that a solution can be found.

## Comprehensives vs. Selective and Independent Schools

There is a gulf opening up between Comprehensive Schools and the Selective and Independent Sector. Last year, while 30% of pupils in Comprehensive Schools were entered for GCSE History, 48% of Independent School pupils were entered for GCSE History and 55% of pupils in Selective Schools:

	<i>Number of pupils at the end of key stage 4 in 2010</i>	<i>Pupils entered for History GCSE in 2010</i>		<i>Pupils entered for History GCSE who obtained a grade C or above in 2010</i>	
	<i>Number</i>	<i>Number</i>	<i>Percentage</i>	<i>Number</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
Comprehensive schools	520,914	155,982	30	101,897	65
Selective maintained schools	22,607	12,389	55	11,827	95
Independent schools	49,932	23,798	48	22,297	94

This divide has been widening for some time. The official figures over the past 13 years show that while the total number of pupils in Comprehensive Schools has dropped from **169,298** pupils taking History GCSE to **155,982** pupils, the number of pupils in Selective schools taking the subject has risen from **10,922** to **12,389**. In Independent schools, the number of pupils taking GCSE History has also increased from **20,984** to **23,798** (though the proportion has dropped- due to the increased number of pupils attending Independent schools).

The widening gap can be marked in the percentage difference of pupils taking GCSE History, between Comprehensives and Selective Schools, which has widened from **17.4 percentage points in 1997** (36.3% to 53.7%), to **24.9% today** (29.9% to 54.8%):

<i>School type</i>						
	<i>Number of pupils <sup>(1)</sup> entered for GCSE <sup>(2)</sup> history</i>			<i>Percentage of pupils <sup>(1)</sup> entered for GCSE <sup>(2)</sup> history</i>		
	<i>Comprehensive</i>	<i>Selective</i>	<i>Independent <sup>(3)</sup></i>	<i>Comprehensive</i>	<i>Selective</i>	<i>Independent <sup>(3)</sup></i>
1997	169,298	10,922	20,984	36.3	53.7	50.1
1998	153,001	10,042	20,490	32.0	50.3	47.0
1999	153,505	10,320	19,851	31.8	50.8	46.4
2000	153,670	10,746	20,168	31.9	53.2	47.2
2001	156,816	11,338	20,891	31.3	54.1	47.5
2002	155,211	11,433	21,269	30.8	53.8	48.2
2003	155,847	11,431	21,317	30.2	52.7	48.1
2004	164,188	12,145	22,252	30.8	54.6	47.4
2005	164,298	12,327	23,619	31.2	55.3	50.5
2006	164,606	12,549	23,930	30.8	55.8	49.1
2007	161,001	11,865	23,951	29.8	52.8	49.9
2008	160,362	12,147	23,694	29.9	53.8	49.5
2009	155,381	11,914	23,229	29.9	53.2	48.0
2010	155,982	12,389	23,798	29.9	54.8	47.7

*Hansard 20 July 2011 : Column 1041W*

## Pinpointing the Problem: Schools where History has been forgotten

Worse still, these figures mask a situation where there are schools across the country where not a single pupil is entered for GCSE History. In 2010, there were 159 mainstream secondary schools where not a single pupil was entered for GCSE History in 2010:

**Chris Skidmore:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education in how many mainstream secondary schools no pupil obtained grade C or above at history GCSE in 2010; and how many mainstream secondary schools did not enter any pupils for a history GCSE in 2010. [65364]

**Mr Gibb** [*holding answer 19 July 2011*]: Of the 3,881 mainstream secondary schools with pupils at the end of Key Stage 4, 159 had no pupils at the end of Key Stage 4 entered for GCSE history in 2010. (Hansard 20 July 2011 : Column 1031W)

A further answer received reveals that of the 2,734 schools have been identified as being mainstream Comprehensive schools:

(a) 63 of these schools entered no pupils for GCSE history

(b) 88 had fewer than 5% of pupils entered for GCSE history

(c) 210 had fewer than 10% entered for GCSE history

(d) 1,102 schools had fewer than 25% of pupils entered for GCSE history in 2010.

(Hansard 15 Sep 2011 : Column 12MC)

This reveals that, in percentage terms:

- **In 13% of Comprehensive Schools less than 10% of pupils took GCSE History (361/2734)**
- **In over half of all Comprehensive Schools, 53%, less than 25% of pupils took GCSE History.**

## **Which Pupils are not studying History?**

There is also a large discrepancy between which pupils are taking GCSE History. This can be analysed both in terms of ethnicity and deprivation, measured by Free School Meals. While 31% of white pupils are entered for GCSE history, just 25% of black pupils take the GCSE, with only 15% gaining pass in the subject, while nearly half as many black pupils take History at A-level.

Only 6.5% of black pupils at A level took History A level, compared with 12% of white pupils.

At the same time, white pupils eligible for Free School Meals made up just 6% of all white pupils studying history at GCSE (9072 out of 147,436) and 2% of white pupils studying the subject at A level (728 out of 30,984) (See Appendix 1- data collected from Parliamentary Question asked by Chris Skidmore, Hansard 19 July 2011 : Column 910W)

## **Where has History been forgotten?**

A study of where pupils are being entered for History GCSE and A Level, broken down by local authority, provides a clear understanding of where the problem lies.

Tables below reveal the 'Top 10' and 'Bottom 10' Local Authorities for pupils being entered for GCSE and A level History. (Hansard 20 July 2011 : Column 1035W- data has been subsequently ranked in order of % of pupils passing history).

### *BOTTOM AND TOP 10 LOCAL AUTHORITIES FOR GCSE HISTORY*

- Just 8.4% of pupils in Knowsley and 9.6% of pupils in Newham pass GCSE History.
- This compares with 35.7% of pupils in Hammersmith and Fulham and 34% in Sutton
- Only 15.6% of pupils in Newham actually even study History GCSE- compared to 47.8% in Rutland and 47.2% in Bracknell Forest

BOTTOM 10	Total Pupils taking GCSE	Pupils taking GCSE History	% of Pupils taking GCSE History	No of pupils passing GCSE History (A*-C)	% of Pupils passing GCSE History
Knowsley	1,601	269	16.8	134	8.4
Newham	3,330	519	15.6	320	9.6
Kingston upon Hull, City of	2,739	603	22	288	10.5
Manchester	4,415	919	20.8	484	11.0
Tower Hamlets	2,393	480	20.1	281	11.7
Sandwell	3,521	767	21.8	421	12.0
Tameside	2,881	635	22	368	12.8
Leicestershire	7,380	1,587	21.5	958	13.0
North Lincolnshire	2,009	448	22.3	261	13.0
Nottingham	2,711	610	22.5	355	13.1

TOP 10	Total Pupils taking GCSE	Pupils taking GCSE History	% of pupils taking GCSE History	No of pupils passing GCSE History (A*-C)	% of pupils passing GCSE History
Hammersmith and Fulham	1,006	442	43.9	359	35.7
Sutton	2,610	1,044	40	887	34.0
Kensington and Chelsea	548	217	39.6	182	33.2
Richmond upon Thames	1,317	598	45.4	428	32.5
Wokingham	1,815	798	44	587	32.3
Rutland	492	235	47.8	159	32.3
Barnet	3,355	1,376	41	1,050	31.3
Bracknell Forest	1,087	513	47.2	339	31.2
West Berkshire	1,965	814	41.4	606	30.8
Trafford	2,825	1,029	36.4	865	30.6

#### *BOTTOM AND TOP 10 LOCAL AUTHORITIES FOR A LEVEL HISTORY*

- Again, Knowsley is one of the worst performers- staggeringly, **just 11 pupils took A level History, with just 4 pupils passing the subject.**
- In the whole of Leicester, out of 1,638 pupils who took A level, just 68 passed A level History- 4.2%

- This compares with 22.6% of pupils in Cambridgeshire who took A level History or 21.3% of pupils in Camden.

BOTTOM 10	Total Pupils taking A level	Pupils taking A level History	% Pupils taking A level History	No.	
				Pupils passing A level History (A-C)	% of A level passing A Level History
Knowsley	212	11	5.2	4	1.9
Leicester	1,638	104	6.3	68	4.2
Middlesbrough	482	41	8.5	22	4.6
North East Lincolnshire	668	47	7	35	5.2
Newham	838	54	6.4	45	5.4
Blackpool	811	71	8.8	44	5.4
Portsmouth	283	30	10.6	17	6.0
Wolverhampton	982	104	10.6	59	6.0
Tower Hamlets	692	54	7.8	42	6.1
Islington	640	59	9.2	39	6.1

TOP 10	Total Pupils taking A level	Pupils taking A level History	% of Pupils taking A level History	No.	
				Pupils passing A level History (A-C)	% of A level passing A level History
Cambridgeshire	2,936	665	22.6	557	19.0
Bath and North East Somerset	928	194	20.9	173	18.6
Camden	976	208	21.3	180	18.4
Southend-on-Sea	1,079	208	19.3	184	17.1
Trafford	1,199	236	19.7	199	16.6
Hertfordshire	7,178	1,451	20.2	1,181	16.5
Reading	494	103	20.9	81	16.4
Plymouth	1,144	233	20.4	184	16.1
Buckinghamshire	3,487	614	17.6	555	15.9
Southwark	373	71	19	59	15.8



*TABLE FOR ALL LOCAL AUTHORITIES- GCSE HISTORY*

- In total, in 77 Local Authorities (marked in red) less than 1 in 5 pupils passed GCSE History

Hammersmith and Fulham	1,006	442	43.9	359	35.7
Sutton	2,610	1,044	40	887	34.0
Kensington and Chelsea	548	217	39.6	182	33.2
Richmond upon Thames	1,317	598	45.4	428	32.5
Wokingham	1,815	798	44	587	32.3
Rutland	492	235	47.8	159	32.3
Barnet	3,355	1,376	41	1,050	31.3
Bracknell Forest	1,087	513	47.2	339	31.2
West Berkshire	1,965	814	41.4	606	30.8
Trafford	2,825	1,029	36.4	865	30.6
Buckinghamshire	5,619	2,208	39.3	1,714	30.5
Kingston upon Thames	1,433	536	37.4	436	30.4
Hertfordshire	12,805	4,988	39	3,757	29.3
Cambridgeshire	5,977	2,363	39.5	1,724	28.8
Bromley	3,358	1,252	37.3	952	28.4
Warrington	2,489	976	39.2	695	27.9
Torbay	1,493	517	34.6	412	27.6
Southend-on-Sea	2,179	734	33.7	589	27.0
Bexley	3,213	1,309	40.7	863	26.9
Hounslow	2,611	982	37.6	699	26.8
North Yorkshire	6,862	2,436	35.5	1,819	26.5
Herefordshire	1,898	746	39.3	499	26.3
Gloucestershire	6,867	2,381	34.7	1,799	26.2
Cheshire East	3,922	1,390	35.4	1,027	26.2
Windsor and Maidenhead	1,511	594	39.3	395	26.1
Oxfordshire	6,284	2,411	38.4	1,625	25.9
Poole	1,659	642	38.7	429	25.9
Redbridge	3,174	1,090	34.3	819	25.8
Havering	3,057	1,102	36	771	25.2
Surrey	10,529	3,649	34.7	2,639	25.1
Dorset	4,328	1,481	34.2	1,077	24.9
Bath and North East Somerset	2,211	760	34.4	547	24.7
Hampshire	13,937	4,961	35.6	3,444	24.7
East Riding of Yorkshire	3,940	1,532	38.9	964	24.5
Enfield	3,583	1,280	35.7	874	24.4
Reading	972	372	38.3	236	24.3
Harrow	2,138	733	34.3	516	24.1

Somerset	5,674	2,098	37	1,347	23.7
York	1,740	617	35.5	413	23.7
Wirral	3,911	1,278	32.7	918	23.5
North Tyneside	2,090	758	36.3	490	23.4
West Sussex	8,393	2,988	35.6	1,966	23.4
Westminster	1,340	450	33.6	312	23.3
Warwickshire	6,013	2,175	36.2	1,382	23.0
Calderdale	2,593	884	34.1	593	22.9
Cumbria	6,064	2,070	34.1	1,384	22.8
North Somerset	2,250	808	35.9	510	22.7
Worcestershire	5,939	1,935	32.6	1,344	22.6
Norfolk	8,962	3,170	35.4	2,020	22.5
Wiltshire	5,164	1,645	31.9	1,153	22.3
Lincolnshire	8,508	2,751	32.3	1,890	22.2
Ealing	2,802	931	33.2	619	22.1
Camden	1,470	472	32.1	322	21.9
Suffolk	7,666	2,752	35.9	1,676	21.9
Kent	16,490	5,095	30.9	3,599	21.8
Shropshire	3,256	1,052	32.3	699	21.5
Essex	15,991	5,279	33	3,389	21.2
Bedfordshire, Central	2,930	1,002	34.2	617	21.1
Slough	1,545	455	29.4	324	21.0
Staffordshire	9,569	3,253	34	1,988	20.8
Wandsworth	1,754	555	31.6	364	20.8
Peterborough	2,214	751	33.9	458	20.7
Bury	2,216	640	28.9	456	20.6
Leeds	8,063	2,472	30.7	1,654	20.5
East Sussex	5,311	1,556	29.3	1,085	20.4
Hartlepool	1,224	405	33.1	250	20.4
Solihull	3,039	886	29.2	618	20.3
Cheshire West and Chester	3,938	1,183	30	796	20.2
Redcar and Cleveland	1,926	564	29.3	389	20.2
Birmingham	11,984	3,538	29.5	2,406	20.1
Derbyshire	8,694	2,622	30.2	1,744	20.1
Nottinghamshire	9,112	2,930	32.2	1,824	20.0
Gateshead	2,084	624	29.9	417	20.0
South Gloucestershire	3,159	1,025	32.4	631	20.0
Brighton and Hove	2,299	658	28.6	455	19.8
Lancashire	13,218	3,782	28.6	2,608	19.7
Stockton-on-Tees	2,266	738	32.6	440	19.4
Croydon	3,631	1,084	29.9	704	19.4
Northumberland	3,544	981	27.7	678	19.1
Hackney	1,286	346	26.9	246	19.1
Sefton	3,293	922	28	628	19.1

Northamptonshire	7,871	2,472	31.4	1,497	19.0
Stockport	2,973	798	26.8	561	18.9
Telford and Wrekin	2,091	620	29.7	393	18.8
Isle of Wight	1,522	526	34.6	285	18.7
Luton	2,357	786	33.3	441	18.7
Liverpool	4,989	1,479	29.6	930	18.6
Brent	2,803	733	26.2	522	18.6
Plymouth	2,934	843	28.7	545	18.6
Dudley	3,883	1,210	31.2	720	18.5
Halton	1,498	414	27.6	276	18.4
Swindon	2,170	686	31.6	398	18.3
Lewisham	2,123	674	31.7	389	18.3
Hillingdon	2,990	829	27.7	541	18.1
Devon	7,621	2,120	27.8	1,371	18.0
Bournemouth	1,743	439	25.2	313	18.0
Haringey	2,105	524	24.9	378	18.0
Greenwich	2,261	643	28.4	405	17.9
Cornwall	5,851	1,644	28.1	1,041	17.8
Waltham Forest	2,530	736	29.1	448	17.7
Portsmouth	1,867	598	32	329	17.6
Medway	3,368	955	28.4	587	17.4
Merton	1,533	427	27.9	266	17.4
Sheffield	5,514	1,539	27.9	947	17.2
Bolton	3,499	930	26.6	597	17.1
Kirklees	4,534	1,259	27.8	768	16.9
Southwark	2,269	669	29.5	383	16.9
Barking and Dagenham	2,108	587	27.8	353	16.7
Durham	5,351	1,358	25.4	893	16.7
Lambeth	1,550	418	27	258	16.6
Thurrock	1,773	454	25.6	295	16.6
Milton Keynes	2,694	734	27.2	448	16.6
Walsall	3,548	900	25.4	568	16.0
Bedford	1,803	449	24.9	288	16.0
Rotherham	3,588	838	23.4	572	15.9
Blackburn with Darwen	1,725	491	28.5	274	15.9
Rochdale	2,520	692	27.5	398	15.8
Wigan	3,810	911	23.9	600	15.7
Derby	2,839	626	22.1	445	15.7
Sunderland	3,379	871	25.8	529	15.7
Doncaster	3,551	1,024	28.8	545	15.3
Southampton	2,058	528	25.7	307	14.9
South Tyneside	1,715	416	24.3	255	14.9
Coventry	3,545	818	23.1	526	14.8
Wakefield	3,954	944	23.9	586	14.8

North East Lincolnshire	1,979	441	22.3	293	14.8
Wolverhampton	2,671	637	23.8	389	14.6
Stoke-on-Trent	2,538	661	26	368	14.5
Leicester	3,457	782	22.6	500	14.5
Barnsley	2,547	703	27.6	368	14.4
Salford	2,140	564	26.4	309	14.4
Middlesbrough	1,644	402	24.5	236	14.4
Bristol, City of	2,924	653	22.3	415	14.2
Darlington	1,142	247	21.6	158	13.8
Isles of Scilly	22	4	18.2	3	13.6
Oldham	2,977	671	22.5	399	13.4
Newcastle upon Tyne	2,484	484	19.5	332	13.4
Blackpool	1,575	398	25.3	208	13.2
Islington	1,382	359	26	182	13.2
St Helens	1,983	409	20.6	261	13.2
Bradford	5,783	1,244	21.5	759	13.1
Nottingham	2,711	610	22.5	355	13.1
North Lincolnshire	2,009	448	22.3	261	13.0
Leicestershire	7,380	1,587	21.5	958	13.0
Tameside	2,881	635	22	368	12.8
Sandwell	3,521	767	21.8	421	12.0
Tower Hamlets	2,393	480	20.1	281	11.7
Manchester	4,415	919	20.8	484	11.0
Kingston upon Hull, City of	2,739	603	22	288	10.5
Newham	3,330	519	15.6	320	9.6
Knowsley	1,601	269	16.8	134	8.4

## Appendix 1: History GCSE/A level by Ethnicity and Free School Meals

### History: GCSE

#### **Hansard 19 July 2011: Column 910W**

**Chris Skidmore:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education how many and what proportion of pupils of each ethnicity eligible for free school meals achieved a grade C or above in (a) history GCSE and (b) history A-level in 2010; how many pupils of each ethnicity were entered for (i) history GCSE and (ii) a history A-level in 2010; and how many were eligible for free school meals. [65365]

**Mr Gibb:** The information requested is provided in the following tables:

*Table 1: Number and percentage of pupils<sup>(1, 2)</sup> entering GCSE history by ethnicity and free school meal (FSM) eligibility<sup>(3)</sup> in 2009/10*

<i>Pupils entering GCSE history</i>				
<i>All pupils</i>			<i>Pupils eligible for FSM</i>	
<i>Ethnicity</i>	<i>Number of pupils</i>	<i>Percentage of pupils</i>	<i>Number of pupils</i>	<i>Percentage of pupils</i>
White	147,436	30.9	9,072	17.3
Mixed	5,173	28.7	642	17.9
Asian	11,053	26.0	2,333	21.4
Black	6,006	24.9	1,506	20.4
Chinese	659	29.5	52	24.2
Other <sup>(4)</sup>	3,800	27.4	626	19.9
<b>Total</b>	<b>174,127</b>	<b>30.1</b>	<b>14,131</b>	<b>18.3</b>

*Table 2: Number and percentage of pupils<sup>(1, 2)</sup> achieving an A\*-C grade in GCSE history by ethnicity and FSM eligibility in 2009/10*

<i>Pupils achieving an A*-C grade in GCSE history</i>				
<i>All pupils</i>			<i>Pupils eligible for FSM</i>	
<i>Ethnicity</i>	<i>Number of pupils</i>	<i>Percentage of pupils</i>	<i>Number of pupils</i>	<i>Percentage of pupils</i>
White	99,301	20.8	3,661	7.0
Mixed	3,497	19.4	313	8.7
Asian	7,653	18.0	1,305	12.5
Black	3,617	15.0	789	10.7
Chinese	571	25.5	33	15.3
Other <sup>(4)</sup>	2,579	18.6	344	10.9
<b>Total</b>	<b>117,218</b>	<b>20.3</b>	<b>6,445</b>	<b>8.3</b>

<sup>(1)</sup> Pupils attending maintained schools (including Academies and CTCs). <sup>(2)</sup> Number of pupils at the end of Key Stage 4. <sup>(3)</sup> FSM eligibility taken from the 2010 Spring School Census (January 2010). <sup>(4)</sup> Includes pupils of any other ethnic group and for whom ethnicity was not obtained, refused or could not be determined. *Source:* National Pupil Database (final data)

*Table 3: Number and percentage of students<sup>(1, 2)</sup> entering A-level history by ethnicity and FSM eligibility<sup>(3)</sup> in 2009/10*

<i>Students entering A-level history</i>				
<i>All students</i>			<i>Students eligible for FSM</i>	
<i>Ethnicity</i>	<i>Number of students</i>	<i>Percentage of students</i>	<i>Number of students</i>	<i>Percentage of students</i>
White	30,984	11.6	728	5.8
Mixed	946	9.7	62	5.0
Asian	1,615	5.9	221	4.1
Black	907	6.5	140	4.8
Chinese	123	5.6	10	5.3
Other <sup>(4)</sup>	1,210	5.6	84	4.1
Total	35,785	10.5	1,245	5.1

*Table 4: Number and percentage of pupils<sup>(1, 2)</sup> achieving an A\*-C grade in A-level history by ethnicity and FSM eligibility<sup>(3)</sup> 2009/10*

<i>Students achieving an A*-C grade in A-level History</i>				
<i>All students</i>			<i>Students eligible for FSM</i>	
<i>Ethnicity</i>	<i>Number of students</i>	<i>Percentage of students</i>	<i>Number of students</i>	<i>Percentage of students</i>
White	24,023	9.0	486	3.9
Mixed	757	7.8	46	3.7
Asian	1,225	4.4	153	2.8
Black	661	4.7	102	3.5
Chinese	98	4.4	7	3.7
Other <sup>1</sup>	992	4.6	61	3.0
Total	27,756	8.1	855	3.5

<sup>(1)</sup> Maintained schools and FE sector colleges only. Students taking A levels in independent schools are not included. <sup>(2)</sup> Students entered for a GCE or Applied GCE A level or other Level 3 qualification equivalent in size to an A level and aged 16-18 at the start of the 2009/10 academic year i.e. 31 August 2009. <sup>(3)</sup> Students eligible for free school meals at the end of year 11. <sup>(4)</sup> Includes students of any other ethnic group and for whom ethnicity or first language was not obtained, refused or could not be determined. *Source:* National Pupil Database (final data)