

2: London Pupils To Achieve Significantly Better Than The National Average At All Key Stages

The high performance of London's schools over the past fifteen years is well known. The city's success is often cited as an example of how schools can succeed even when serving disadvantaged communities.

Over recent years the government has introduced new tougher standards for both primary and secondary schools. If the London school system is to be truly world-class, competing with the highest performing systems globally, then pupil achievement in London will need to be significantly better than the national average against these new standards at all Key Stages. In practice, this will require more pupils to be achieving the highest grades and for the gap between disadvantaged pupils and their peers to be closing faster than in other areas of the country.

This section considers current performance in London from how well pupils are reading and writing in their first years in primary school, to their performance in GCSEs and A-levels at the end of secondary school.

The first years of primary school

The city's relatively high performance is established in the first years of primary school. London's 6 year-olds out-perform those in other regions in the Year 1 phonics check, intended to assess whether pupils have achieved the expected level of reading skill. In 2016, London retained its position at the top of the performance tables nationally and saw a small increase in the proportion of pupils reaching the required standard.⁵⁸

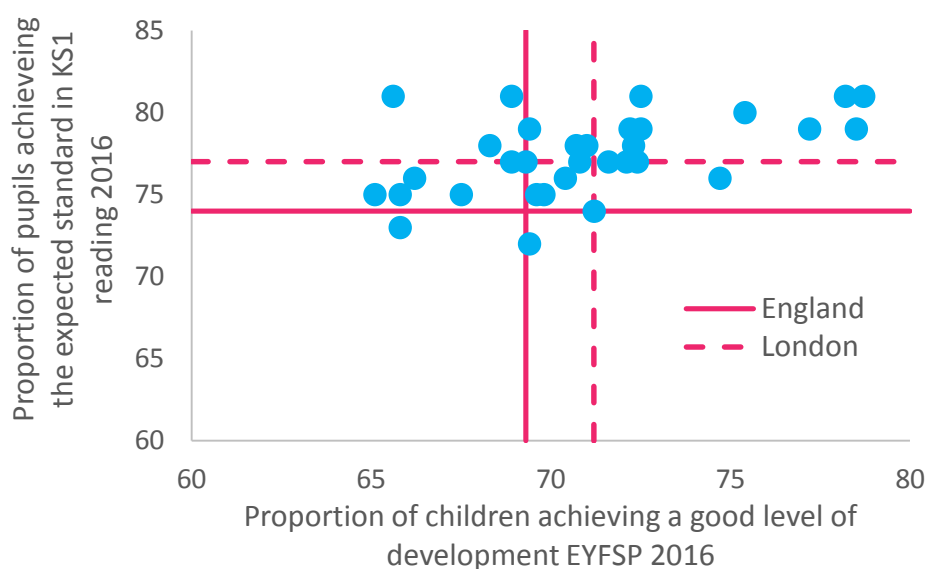
Similarly, pupils in London perform well at the end of Key Stage 1 (pupils who are typically aged 7). In 2016, new Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2 assessments were introduced, which were the first to assess pupils under the new national curriculum that is designed to be more challenging.⁵⁹

As a consequence, the proportion of Key Stage 1 pupils reaching the new expected standard in reading in 2016 is far lower than the proportion who achieved the old national benchmark of a level 2B in 2015. Nevertheless, **pupils in London out-performed their counterparts elsewhere, with 77 per cent of pupils reaching the expected standard in reading at the end of Key Stage 1 (compared with 74 per cent of pupils nationally).**⁶⁰

In the first years of primary school, five London authorities are below the national average. By age 7, pupils in London are out-performing the national average in all but two local authority areas in London.

But just as in the early years, it is not a consistent picture across London. Pupils in Ealing and Enfield perform slightly below the national average (72 and 73 per cent respectively), whereas pupils in Hackney, Kensington and Chelsea, Wandsworth, Bexley and Greenwich perform well above the national average (at 81 per cent)⁶¹. If pupils in Ealing achieved at the same level as the highest performing areas then an additional 400 pupils in the borough would reach the expected level in reading at age 7.⁶²

Areas that see high performance in the EYFSP also see high performance at the end of Key Stage 1 (Figure 2.1). It is also worth noting that many areas that are below the England average in the early years are then above at the end of Key Stage 1. **In other words, pupils in these areas are catching up and overtaking other pupils nationally during the first years of primary school.**

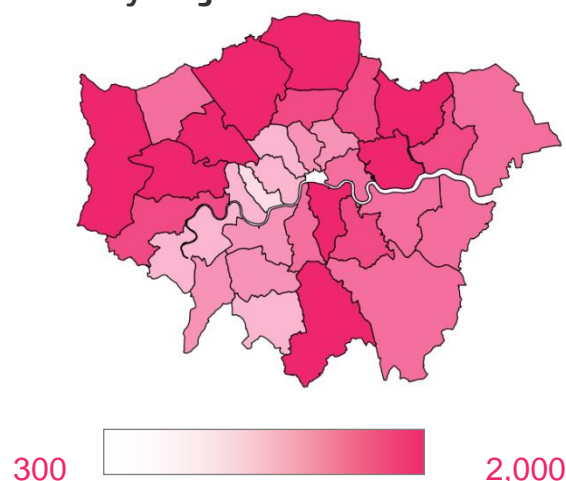
Figure 2.1: Performance by local authority in London on the EYFSP and in Key Stage 1 reading 2016⁶³

Outcomes at the end of primary school

Across England, the proportion of pupils reaching the new expected standard in each of reading, writing and mathematics at age 11 in 2016 is far lower than the percentage that achieved the previous expected standard of a level 4. **London remains the highest performing region, with 59 per cent of pupils meeting or exceeding the new expected standard in all three of reading, writing and mathematics in 2016** (the average for England is 53 per cent).⁶⁴

Whilst the relative performance of London's schools remains high, **these new assessments reveal that over 40 per cent of the city's children are currently leaving primary school not fully ready for secondary school.**⁶⁵ In 2016, 39,000 pupils in London did not achieve the expected standard in reading, writing and mathematics at the end of primary school. Figure 2.2 shows how these pupils are distributed across London.

Figure 2.2: Number of pupils who did not achieve the expected standard in reading, writing and mathematics at Key Stage 2 in 2016⁶⁶



Outcomes in London's secondary schools

New accountability arrangements were introduced at Key Stage 4 in 2016, including two new headline measures: Attainment 8 and Progress 8. These measure a pupil's attainment in eight subjects which fulfil certain requirements, and the progress of pupils between Key Stage 2 and Key Stage 4. These measures replace the previous 5 A*-C inc English and mathematics as the key attainment measure at Key Stage 4.

In 2016, **London had the highest Attainment 8 score of any region in England, at 51.9;** this compares with the national average of 50.1.⁶⁷ **London performed particularly well on the Progress 8 measure, with an average score of 0.16. This was far ahead of any other region (the East of England, directly behind London, achieved a score of 0.03) and substantially higher than the England-wide average of negative 0.03.**⁶⁸

London performs well on the government's new 'Progress 8' measure. Its score of +0.16 means that pupils achieve about a sixth of a grade higher in each GCSE subject than pupils with similar prior attainment nationally.

Pupils in London are far more likely to be entered for all EBacc subjects, and far more likely to achieve good grades in these subjects.

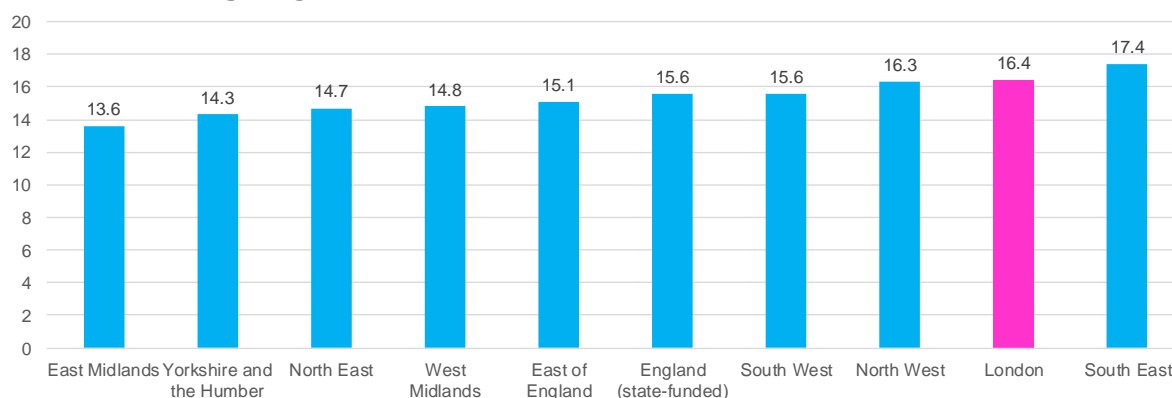
49.8 per cent of pupils were entered for all components of the EBacc and 31.9 per cent of all pupils achieved it – this is much higher than the average for England's state schools (39.8 per cent entered and 24.8 per cent achieved).⁶⁹

In 2016, pupils in London were more likely to achieve five good GCSEs including English and mathematics than the national average, but were only marginally ahead of the next highest performing region, the South East.⁷⁰ Unlike at primary level, pupils in Outer London performed better than Inner London in terms of attainment. As it is no longer the headline measure of school performance, it is likely that schools are now less focused on raising performance against this metric and are instead concentrating on achievement across the Attainment 8 subjects.

Outcomes at A-level

London has a high rate of students achieving top grades (AAB+) in ‘facilitating subjects’⁷¹ – these are subject combinations preferred by Russell Group universities – a group of 24 universities often considered to be the ‘leading’ universities in the UK including Oxford and Cambridge. Amongst A-level students in London, 16.4 per cent achieved AAB+ in facilitating subjects.

Figure 2.3: Proportion of students achieving AAB+, at A-level, of which at least two are in facilitating subjects, 2015/16⁷²



However, unlike at GCSE, London is not the highest performing region at A-level on this measure, coming second to the South East. London also trails when considering average point score per entry amongst level 3 students. In London, the average point score per entry for level 3 students was 32.53, again second to the South East.⁷³

The fact that higher proportions of students are remaining in education than nationally, and London is not the top performing region; may reflect a situation in which low prior attaining students are continuing studies where they are unable to achieve the highest grades. Alternatively, or simultaneously, it might be that schools and colleges in London are pushing students into A-level subjects that are perceived to be ‘tougher’ and better for prospects.

A world-class ambition for London’s schools

It is clear that London’s schools perform well in comparison to national averages. Performance in London has increased rapidly over the last fifteen years and pupils in London are frequently at the top of national performance tables.

The ambition for London goes beyond simply being above average nationally: it means a school system that matches the performance of the best systems globally. It is therefore important to benchmark performance in London not only against other regions in England, but against these world-class benchmarks.

The Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) is a key international comparison of the attainment of 15 year-olds⁷⁴. The PISA test comprises of an assessment across three core domains: reading, mathematics and science. Each round of PISA has a different focus; in 2009 it was reading and in 2012 it was mathematics. Traditionally, PISA results have been used to compare the performance of countries, but there has been an increasing interest in comparing

cities and regions. Last year, research commissioned by the GLA and produced by the Institute of Education, benchmarked the performance of London's 15 year-olds against a selection of cities and states using data from PISA 2009 and 2012.⁷⁵

This research found that, overall, London's performance in both reading and mathematics does not appear to be particularly strong. When compared to other cities or states, London's performance on mathematics places it in 24th position out of the 37 economies included.⁷⁶ It is significantly behind 17 cities or states, including Riga, Reykjavik and Milan. **Children in Shanghai are approximately three years of schooling ahead of children in London** and *"only the top 10 percent of London pupils have mathematics skills equal to the average child in Shanghai"*. Similarly, London is ranked 26th out of 37 cities and states for reading.⁷⁷

While London performs well on domestic measures of attainment, its performance compares less favourably to other cities and countries. The most recent PISA 2015 focused on pupil performance in science and whilst this was shown to be area of strength for the UK, there is interest to see how this translates for London.

Improving London's standing in international comparisons will require effort which starts in the early years. **While so many pupils are ending primary school below the expected standard, it is unlikely that London's schools will be able to achieve world-class outcomes by the end of secondary school.**

The Education Policy Institute's Annual Report 2016 proposed a series of benchmarks for England's primary and secondary schools that would assess how far England is from being amongst the highest performing jurisdictions. It suggested that in order for England's secondary schools to be world-class by 2030, 85 per cent of pupils would need to leave primary school having achieved the equivalent of a level 4B or above in reading, writing and mathematics by 2025.⁷⁸

The report found that while London had seen the biggest gains over the past fifteen years, only 61.2 per cent of primary pupils were achieving the required standard.⁷⁹ **In fact, there are no local authorities where the proportion of pupils meeting the expected standard matches this world-class benchmark.**

The Education Policy Institute's 2016 annual report also proposed a world-class benchmark of attainment for secondary schools that 75 per cent of pupils achieve 50+ points in Attainment 8 by 2030. In 2015, London was the highest performing region against this benchmark, with 44.1 per cent of the city's pupils achieving this standard, compared to a national average of 38.0 per cent.⁸⁰ **London's performance against this measure needs to improve by just over 30 percentage points – or 2 percentage points every year – to reach the Key Stage 4 world-class attainment standard.**

London's key challenges

London pupils overall do very well compared to other regions. However, there are still significant numbers of pupils who are not in good or outstanding schools and are not achieving the minimum standards.

School to school support mechanisms need to be effectively harnessed to get the right support to London schools and teachers.

Schools will face increased budgetary pressures over the next few years due to rising costs and pupil numbers, as well as the proposed new schools funding formula which will impact London schools with budget reductions greater than anywhere else.

At Key Stage 5 London still has not been able to emulate its success in the earlier phases, and performs below the national average on A-level points per entry.