

Debate Pack

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Educational attainment of boys

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1 Background

There will be a general debate on the educational attainment of boys on Tuesday 5 March at 9:30am. This debate will take place in Westminster Hall and will be led by Nick Fletcher MP, chair of the [All-Party Parliamentary Group on Issues Affecting Men and Boys](#). The APPG published [a report on boys' educational outcomes](#) in November 2023.

1.1 School outcomes

Boys perform worse than girls on most major educational indicators through their school years. In England, and in the 2022-23 academic year, boys performed worse on the following measures:

- [Exclusion](#): in the autumn term, boys were nearly twice as likely as girls to be suspended, and slightly more than twice as likely to be permanently excluded.¹
- [End of reception year](#): Just under two-thirds of boys had a 'good level of development' aged around five, compared to around three-quarters of girls.²
- [End of primary schooling](#): 63% of girls met the expected standard in all of English reading, writing and maths, compared to 56% of boys. However, boys did slightly better than girls, in maths alone: 73% met the expected standard, compared to 72% of girls.³
- [End of compulsory secondary education](#): girls do better across all headline Department for Education (DfE) measures than boys. For example, in 2023, 68% of girls in state-funded schools achieved both English and maths GCSEs at grade 4 or above, compared to 63% of boys.⁴
- [Some groups of boys have particularly low attainment levels](#). For example, of those eligible for free school meals (FSM), only 34% of White British boys, 35% of mixed White and Black Caribbean boys, and 36% of Caribbean boys attained grade 4 in both English and maths

¹ Department for Education, [Autumn term 2022/23. Suspensions and permanent exclusions in England](#), 23 November 2023, main text

² Department for Education, [Early years foundation stage profile results: 2022 to 2023, 30 November 2023](#), main text and [custom table](#)

³ Department for Education, [Academic year 2022/23. Key stage 2 attainment](#), 14 December 2023, main text

⁴ Department for Education, [Academic year 2022/23. Key stage 4 performance](#), 1 February 2024, [custom table](#)

GCSEs in 2023. FSM-eligible boys from Gypsy/ Roma or Traveller of Irish Heritage backgrounds had particularly low pass rates but small absolute numbers of these pupils mean caution is needed interpreting the percentage figures for these groups.⁵

Boys [are also more likely to have identified special educational needs](#) than girls. In January 2023, 22% of boys had identified SEN, compared to 12% of girls. 6% of boys had Education, health and care (EHC) plans, suggesting more complex special educational needs, compared to 2% of girls. These figures include pupils at all types of state-funded school, and non-maintained special schools.⁶

1.2 Higher education

Men are considerably less likely to progress to higher education by age 19, than women, and this has been the case for many years. [In 2021/22](#), 54% of women were in HE by 19, compared to only 40% of men. The gender gap has risen slightly on this measure, since the previous year, 2020/21.⁷ Men are also more likely to drop out of their HE courses.

Of those that do go into HE by 19, [broadly similar proportions of men and women go to ‘high tariff’ institutions](#) – that is, institutions typically requiring higher grades for entry.⁸

[Course choices also differ](#), with men more likely than women to study most science, technology, engineering and maths (STEM) courses, and women more likely to study education, subjects allied to medicine and most humanities.⁹

1.3 Outcomes after completion of higher education

The picture shifts after graduation. Men who complete their HE qualification are more likely to be in professional or managerial posts, further advanced study, or other positive outcomes, than women. The [latest data is for 2020/21](#)

⁵ Department for Education, [Academic year 2022/23. Key stage 4 performance](#), 1 February 2024, [custom table](#)

⁶ Department for Education, [Special educational needs in England](#), 22 June 2023, [custom table](#)

⁷ Department for Education, [Widening participation in higher education, academic year 2021/22](#), 13 July 2023, main text

⁸ Department for Education, [Widening participation in higher education, academic year 2021/22](#), 13 July 2023, [custom table](#)

⁹ See for example, [e UCAS undergraduate end of cycle data resources, 2023](#)

[graduates](#) where the progression rate for men was 1.4 percentage points higher than for women.¹⁰

Men who complete higher education also go on to have higher wages on average, than women. The [latest data is for earnings in the 2020/21 tax year](#), and covers UK-domiciled students who attended an English higher education institutions:

- Five years after graduation, females with a first degree (only) had earnings 11.8% lower than their male peers
- For females with a taught masters-level qualification, earnings five years post-qualification were 15.9% lower than for male peers.¹¹

The underlying data cannot distinguish between part-time and full-time working patterns, however, and some of the difference in earnings will be due to differences in the incidence of part-time work by sex.

¹⁰ Office for Students, [Student characteristics data: student outcomes – key findings](#), 25 July 2023, p6-7

¹¹ Department for Education, [Tax year 2020-21, LEO Graduate and Postgraduate Outcomes](#), 6 July 2023, main text

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Parliamentary material

[International Men's Day](#)

21 November 2023 | Westminster Hall | 741 cc11-34WH

Education: Boys

13 February 2024 | UIN 13476

Asked by: Nick Fletcher

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, whether she has taken steps to implement recommendation 27 on page 260 of the Equality and Human Rights Commission's report entitled Equality and Human Rights Monitor, published in November 2023, on the under-performance of boys relative to girls in primary and secondary education.

Answering member: Damian Hinds | Department: Department for Education

Raising attainment for all pupils, no matter their gender or background is at the heart of this government's agenda and the government is committed to providing a world-class education system for all.

The latest data shows that, while girls continue to outperform boys across most headline measures, the gender gap between boys and girls is narrowing.

At key stage 2 in 2022/23, the gender gap between boys and girls at the expected standard in reading, writing and mathematics has decreased since 2022 and is the lowest it has been since 2016. Key stage 4 results show the gender gap has narrowed across all headline measures when comparing 2022/23 with both 2018/19 and 2021/22.

The Schools White Paper, published in March 2022, was clear about the direction of travel needed to improve attainment. It set out the department's long-term vision for a school system that helps every child to fulfil their potential by ensuring that they receive the right support, in the right place, at the right time – founded on achieving world-class literacy and numeracy.

This is supported by significant investment in education with the overall core school budget totalling over £59.6 billion in 2024/25 which is the highest ever level in real terms per pupil. This will help schools in their vital work to close attainment gaps, and level up educational opportunities.

Alongside this, the department takes a range of steps to improve attainment and outcomes for all pupils, including improving the quality of teaching and curriculum resources, strengthening the school system, increasing attendance, and providing targeted support where needed.

The department is aware that disadvantaged pupils and those with additional needs are more likely to fall behind and need extra support to reach their full potential. This is why the department has provided additional funding to support disadvantaged pupils through the pupil premium, which will rise to over £2.9 billion in 2024/25, an increase of £80 million from 2023/24.

Programmes such as free school meals that support 2 million children, the Holiday Activities and Food programme, and support for up to 2,700 breakfast clubs also support disadvantaged pupils.

The department continues to collaborate with other government departments to address out-of-school factors that we know have a significant impact on attainment outcomes.

Literacy: Primary Education

14 July 2023 | UIN 192712

Asked by: Nick Fletcher

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, pursuant to the Answer of 23 June 2023 to Question 189737 Primary Education: Boys, whether her Department has produced research on interventions at Key Stage 1 and 2 that have closed attainment gaps in (a) literacy and (b) phonics between boys and girls.

Answering member: Nick Gibb | Department: Department for Education

The Government is committed to continuing to raise literacy standards for all pupils, regardless of gender. English is fundamental to education and provides the skills and knowledge pupils need to communicate with others, both in school and in the wider world. Language in the early years is also associated with long-term employment outcomes. Children with poor vocabulary at age five are more than twice as likely to be unemployed at age 34 as children with good vocabulary, according to research which is available at:

https://eresearch.qmu.ac.uk/bitstream/handle/20.500.12289/1057/eResearch_h_1057.pdf?sequence=1.

By ensuring high quality systematic synthetic phonics teaching, the Government wants to improve literacy levels to give all children a solid base upon which to build as they progress through school, and help children to develop the habit of reading widely and often, for both pleasure and information.

The Education Endowment Foundation (EEF) and the Sutton Trust are, together, the Government-designated What Works Centre for Education. The EEF has carried out a comprehensive review of robust studies on the effects of phonics. They found that phonics is more effective on average than other approaches for early reading, when embedded in a rich literacy environment. Phonics approaches have been consistently found to be effective in supporting younger readers to master the basics of reading, with an average impact of an additional four months' progress.

Since 2010, the Government has accelerated the effective teaching of phonics, by placing it at the heart of the curriculum and introducing the annual phonics screening check in 2012 for pupils at the end of Year 1.

The recent publication of the international literacy study, Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) 2021, showed England was among the top scoring countries, coming fourth out of the 43 countries that tested children of the same age. The performance of England's pupils in PIRLS 2021 remained stable after significant improvements in 2011 and 2016. As well as the overall success, both the gender gap and the gap between the highest and lowest achievers have continued to narrow, driven in the long term by the improvement of the scores of boys and the lowest attainers. Researchers have found that the Phonics Screening Checks (PSC) score was the most significant predictor of PIRLS performance.

In 2018, the Department also launched the £60 million English Hubs Programme to improve the teaching of reading, with a focus on phonics, early language development and reading for pleasure. The English Hubs have delivered intensive support to 1,700 schools to date. Departmental analysis shows that partner schools supported by the English Hubs Programme outperformed other schools by around seven percentage points in their PSC.

Education: Standards

29 June 2023 | UIN 190498

Asked by: Ben Bradley

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what steps her Department plans to take to improve learning outcomes for boys.

Answering member: Nick Gibb | Department: Department for Education

The Government is committed to improving outcomes for all pupils no matter their gender, and raising attainment is a priority. The Government has successfully driven up standards over the past decade. In 2010, only 68% of schools were rated good or outstanding compared to 87% today.

Following the COVID-19 pandemic, evidence from the Education Endowment Foundation, Star Assessments and Renaissance Learning shows attainment for all pupils, including boys, has fallen compared to pre-pandemic levels. In response to this, the Department is taking action to support schools, increasing core schools funding in the Autumn Statement 2022. The additional funding will mean that the core schools' budget is a net £2 billion higher than published at the Autumn Budget and Spending Review 2021 in each of 2023/24 and 2024/25.

The Department continues to deliver the proposals set out in the Schools White Paper, which aim to improve outcomes for all pupils, including boys. This includes providing an excellent teacher for every pupil, securing high standards in curriculum, behaviour and attendance, and providing targeted support for every pupil who needs it.

For teachers, the Department remains committed to delivering £30,000 starting salaries to attract and retain the very best teachers. In addition, the Department will deliver 500,000 teacher training and development opportunities by the end of 2024 and has recently announced a £181 million incentive package for Initial Teacher Training. This package of support will secure more high quality teaching, which is the single most important in school factor on attainment.

The Department continues to promote the use of phonics and supports schools to offer a high quality, knowledge rich curriculum, both of which are critical to ensuring boys are able to achieve well in later life. In addition, the Government has established the Oak National Academy, setting aside up to £43 million over the next three years to support it to provide high quality resources to schools.

The Department continues to support schools through the Pupil Premium, National Tutoring Programme and Recovery Premium. More than £1 billion is available to support tutoring up to 2023/24, with a further £1 billion of Recovery Premium funding in the 2022/23 and 2023/24 academic years.

The Government remains committed to raising overall attainment, and reducing the number of pupils in underperforming schools, by creating a stronger and fairer school system. The Department will continue to support schools, trusts and authorities to deliver excellent outcomes for every pupil.

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Press material

[Cambridge study finds girls outperform boys at school](#)

BBC News

15 January 2024

[We must end the 30-year silence about boys' underperformance](#)

Nick Fletcher MP

Schools Week

27 November 2023

[Gender gap shrinks and regional gap widens: 2023's key GCSE trends in England](#)

The Guardian

24 August 2023

[Trend of underperforming boys ignored 'because of focus on girl's achievements'](#) [subscription required]

The Telegraph

21 August 2023

[The scandal of Pupil Referral Units](#)

The Voice

30 June 2023

[Time to break the conspiracy of silence around boys' under-achievement in school](#)

Nick Fletcher MP

Centre for Policy Studies

24 January 2023

[The 'taboo' about who doesn't go to university](#)

BBC News

27 September 2020

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Further reading

[Inquiry No 4: Boys' Educational Underachievement](#)

APPG on issues affecting men and boys

November 2023

[Equality of access and outcomes in higher education in England](#)

House of Commons Library

31 January 2023

[Boys' and Young Men's Education Toolkit](#)

Men and Boys Coalition

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