



ENGLISH AS AN ADDITIONAL LANGUAGE AND ATTAINMENT IN SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN ENGLAND

Research Brief

English as an Additional Language (EAL) attracts much interest among policy makers and educationists and yet little is known about the performance of EAL pupils who are not fluent in English and who speak different languages at home. The findings of the analysis of 558,432 pupils KS4 results in England suggests that:-

- EAL pupils not fluent in English achieve significantly below the national average compared to monolingual English speakers in English schools.
- There is a wide variation in performance between regions in England with large attainment gaps in the Yorkshire and the Humber, East, South West, East Midlands, and the North West regions.
- A further analysis of the EAL data by languages spoken at home suggests over 240 languages are spoken in English schools by KS4 pupils. Of the Black African language groups, Portuguese, Wolof, Lingala, Hausa and Bemba, Chichewa, Tigrinya, Zulu speakers were the lowest achieving groups while the Igbo, Edo/Bini, Yoruba, Swedish, Amharic, English, Luganda, Twi-Fante and Arabic speaking Black African pupils achieved better than White British and the national average. The data also show Somali, Ga, Krio, Shona and Swahili speakers are narrowing the achievement gap. Within the Indian EAL groups the highest performing language groups were Marathi, Telugu, Bengali, Malayalam and English speaking pupils all above the national average and White British. Those pupils within Pakistani language groups performed less well with Panjabi (Pothwari), Pahari, Panjabi (other), and Kashmiri performing ten percentage points or more below the national average. Hindko, Bengali, English and Gujarati speaking Pakistani pupils all performed above White British and the national average. Within the White Other category, there is a large variation in performance depending on the language that is spoken. The highest achieving groups were west European language speakers of French, Dutch/Flemish, Swedish, English, German, Greek and Italian, who all out-performed pupils who had English as a first language. Ukrainian and Serbian/Croatian/Bosnia speakers also performed very well. The lowest achieving groups were from Eastern Europe including Czech, Slovak, Latvian, Lithuanian, Hungarian, Romanian, Russian, Bulgarian and Polish speaking pupils, with most of these groups performing at least ten percentage points below the national average. Also low-performing were Portuguese, Kurdish, Turkish, and Arabic speaking pupils. Of the larger European language groups in English schools, Polish, Portuguese, Turkish and Lithuanian speakers, were achieving below the national average.
- An examination of EAL pupils attainment by level of fluency in English on pupil performance also confirms that there is a strong relationship between the stage of fluency in English and educational attainment. The results suggest that the percentage of pupils attaining five or more GCSE examinations graded A* to C including English and mathematics, increased as stage of proficiency in English increased. Pupils in the early stages of fluency performed at low levels, while EAL pupils who were fully fluent in English far outstripped those of pupils for whom English was their only language.

Overall the conclusion from this study suggests that language barriers remain the key factor affecting the performance of EAL pupils in English schools. We would argue that the worryingly low achievement of EAL pupils who are not fluent in English has been masked by failure of government statistics to distinguish EAL pupils by stages of fluency in English and languages spoken at home.

Notes for editors

1. The findings are published in a research report entitled '**English as an Additional Language and Attainment in Secondary Schools in England.**'
2. The research was carried out by Dr Feyisa Demie, Head of Research and Adviser for school self-evaluation at Lambeth LA.
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