



**THE ACHIEVEMENT OF PORTUGUESE PUPILS  
IN LAMBETH SCHOOLS – EMPIRICAL  
EVIDENCE 2023**

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## Contents

<b>1. INTRODUCTION</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>2. AIMS AND OBJECTIVES OF THE RESEARCH</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>3. THE LA CONTEXT</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>Number of Portuguese Pupils in Lambeth Schools</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>The Dataset</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>Measures of Performance</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>4. THE ACHIEVEMENT OF PORTUGUESE PUPILS IN SCHOOLS</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>KS1 and KS2 Trend Evidence</b>	<b>9 &amp; 10</b>
<b>GCSE Evidence</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>5. FACTORS AFFECTING ACHIEVEMENT OF PORTUGUESE HERITAGE PUPILS</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>Social Characteristics of Portuguese Pupils in Schools</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>Gender Differences and Achievement</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>Social Background and Achievement</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>English Language Acquisition and Achievement</b>	<b>16</b>
<b>Pupil Mobility and Achievement</b>	<b>18</b>
<b>6. CONCLUSIONS AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS</b>	<b>19</b>
<b>Conclusions</b>	<b>19</b>
<b>Policy Implications</b>	<b>19 &amp; 20</b>
<b>References</b>	<b>21</b>

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The original Portuguese report in 2001, had this to say as an introduction.

*“English schools have been educating immigrant children for decades. Recently, however, new arrivals have brought challenges to schools as the majority are relatively new to English. Because of a lack of available data there is little research into the achievement of Portuguese pupils. There are no reliable statistics on the Portuguese population as a separate ethnic group in Britain and there is little clarity on the number of Portuguese pupils in schools. Additionally, the educational underachievement of Portuguese students in British schools has seldom been mentioned in the standards debate in the last decade. Yet the achievement of Portuguese heritage pupils lags far behind the average achievement of the majority of their peers and the gap is growing at the end of primary and secondary education. Despite much academic debate and policy makers' concern about underachievement in schools, the needs of Portuguese pupils have not been addressed and are overlooked by local and national policy makers because of the failure to recognise Portuguese as a distinct ethnic group in data collection.”*

Evidence in Lambeth showed a pattern of continuous underachievement of Portuguese children compared to the national average of White British, African, Caribbean, Indian and other ethnic minority groups (Demie et al 2006). However, in recent years, the achievement of Portuguese children has been rising and the gap with Lambeth overall has been closing. The KS2, KS3 and GCSE trend data in Lambeth also indicates Portuguese pupils were in most instances the lowest attaining of the major ethnic groups, although in 2011 they are higher than Black Other pupils for GCSE.

Broadly speaking, there are marked differences in performance between different ethnic groups at national level. Chinese, Indian and White British pupils are the highest achieving groups, followed by Black African, Bangladeshi and Black Caribbean at all key stages. Portuguese pupils are the lowest achieving group. This is not surprising as the findings from a number of previous studies came to similar conclusions (Demie 2001; Gillborn and Mirza 2000; Gillborn and Gipps 1996). Perhaps the most important new evidence from the national data is that there is now some evidence that Chinese, Bangladeshi and Indian heritage pupils are improving at higher rates, leading to a narrowing of the gap between these groups and White British pupils.

Portuguese heritage pupils have also, like Black African and Black Caribbean pupils, shown sufficient rates of improvement to close the attainment gap. This, however, is still wide for KS1, KS2 and KS3. As with findings from previous studies the data highlights a particular disadvantage experienced by Portuguese and black heritage pupils in the British education system (Demie 2001; Gillborn and Mirza 2000; Gillborn and Gipps 1996). To date it has been difficult to draw generalised conclusions from research into Portuguese educational achievement because national level data in Britain does not distinctly categorize Portuguese pupils, making it difficult to accurately establish the relative achievement of Portuguese pupils compared to White British and other ethnic groups. Recently a number of London Local Authorities (LAs) with high populations of Portuguese pupils started monitoring and collecting data which provides interesting research evidence. The data collected by London LAs confirms that Portuguese pupils have not shared equally in increasing rates of achievement (see Demie et al 2006).

Previous studies attribute the roots of Portuguese pupil underachievement (Demie et al 2006) to a number of factors including lack of understanding of the British education system, difficulties in speaking English, poor school attendance, poverty, interrupted prior education, negative teacher perceptions, poor school to home liaison and lack of exposure to written language.

Research in Lambeth also suggests that Portuguese children are underachieving in schools and that they form one of the fastest growing ethnic groups in London (Demie et al 2007). One of the main reasons for Portuguese pupil underachievement is the lack of fluency in English, creating a considerable language barrier. About 68% of Portuguese pupils in Lambeth schools are not fluent in English. The study also confirms that, as highlighted in other studies, underachievement of

Portuguese pupils is perpetuated by factors such as low expectations, economic deprivation, poor housing, overcrowding, a disrupted prior education and parental lack of understanding of the British education system. The Lambeth study also identified strategies that have been adopted to overcome some of the barriers to achievement which face Portuguese children in schools. These include parental engagement, effective use of a more diverse workforce, developing an inclusive ethos and strategies, developing an inclusive curriculum, support for EAL, mentoring and role models, monitoring performance and the effective use of data for self-evaluation (Demie et al 2007).

Overall the review of literature confirms there is a lack of national comparative attainment data to identify patterns of achievement of children of Portuguese origin in Britain. This places serious constraints on effecting targeting policy and practice developments at national and local level. The body of available research suggests that most previous studies have focussed on reasons why Portuguese children are underachieving (see Demie et al 2007; Demie et al 2006) but with scant research on positive experiences of Portuguese pupils in British schools. Previous research has confirmed that there is a lack of understanding of the factors which contribute to the educational success and high attainment of Portuguese heritage pupils (see Demie 2006, McKenley et al, 2003). This highlighted a clear need for detailed case studies of successful schools in raising the achievement of Portuguese heritage pupils as a means of increasing our understanding of the ways in which schools can enhance pupils' academic achievement.

## **2. AIMS AND OBJECTIVES OF THE RESEARCH**

This research project aims to raise the achievement of Portuguese heritage pupils at all key stages. Specific objectives are:

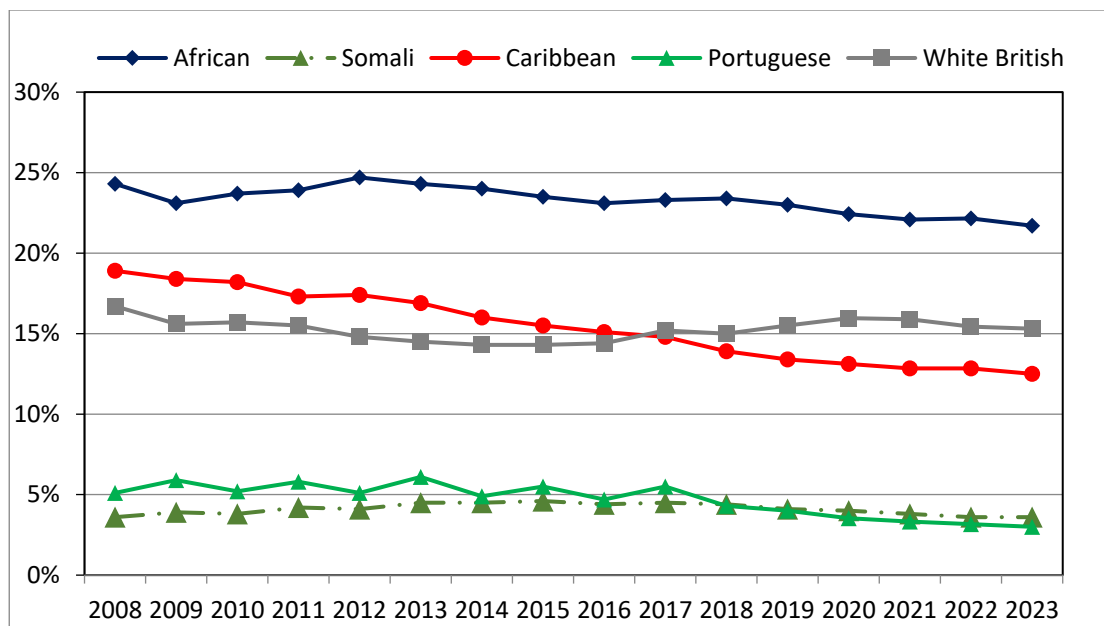
- To study the achievement of Portuguese heritage pupils at the end of Key Stage 1, Key Stage 2, and GCSE.
- To examine the school experiences of Portuguese heritage pupils.
- To identify reasons for underachievement.

### 3. THE LA CONTEXT

#### Number of Portuguese Pupils in Lambeth Schools

This research paper considers evidence from Lambeth, an inner London Authority. Lambeth LA is one of the most ethnically, linguistically and culturally diverse boroughs in Britain. Approximately 85% of pupils are from black and ethnic minority groups. The 2023 January Schools Census shows that there were 36,942 pupils in the LA's schools. Of these, African pupils formed the largest ethnic group with 21.7% followed by White British (15.3%), Black Caribbean (12.5%), White Other (11.6%), Mixed Other (7.5%), and Any Other Group (5.9%).

**Figure 1. Changes in the School Composition in the LA by Main Ethnic Group**



\*African total includes Somali pupils

There has been a change in the overall composition of the black and ethnic minority population in Lambeth schools. In 1991 66% of pupils in the LA's schools belonged to black and other ethnic minority communities, compared to 82% in 2021.

Of all English local authorities, Lambeth serves the largest proportion of Portuguese pupils and findings from this study are therefore of significant importance for formulating policies and strategies aimed at raising the achievement of Portuguese pupils at both national and local level.

**Table 1. Number of Portuguese Speaking Pupils in Lambeth Schools (2003-2023)**

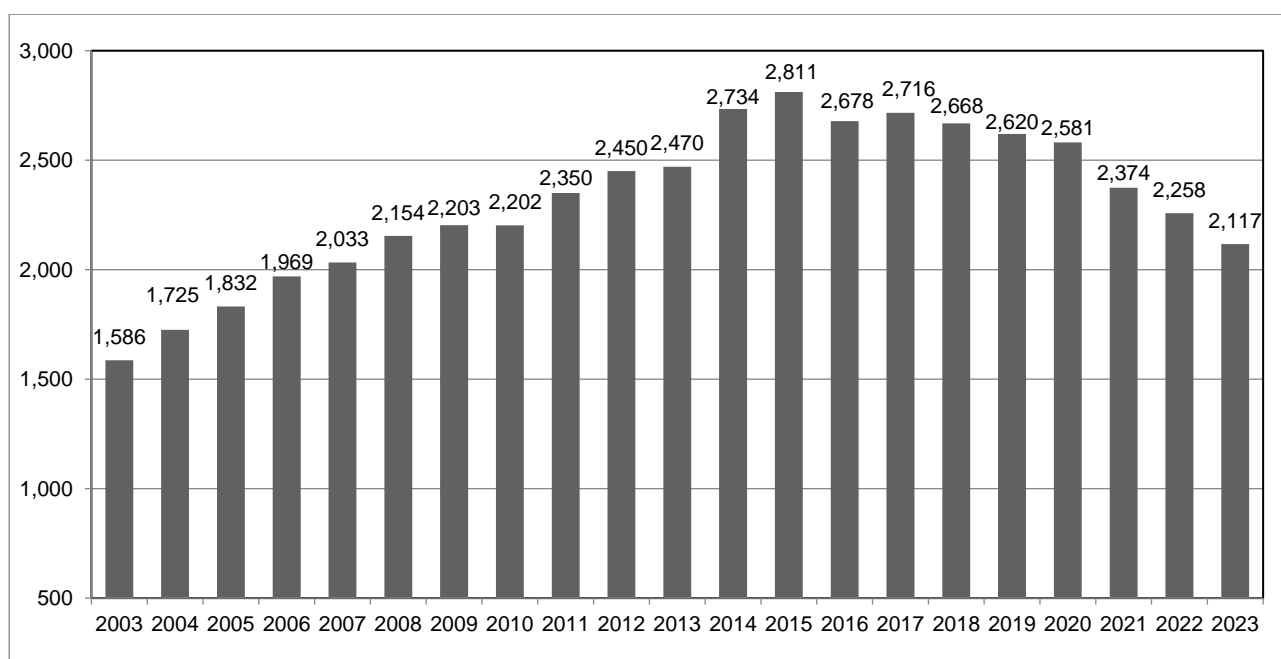
Year	All Schools	Primary	Secondary
2003	1,586	1,172	367
2004	1,725	1,308	382
2005	1,832	1,366	432
2006	1,969	1,452	479
2007	2,033	1,470	526
2008	2,154	1,532	575
2009	2,203	1,550	613
2010	2,202	1,534	631
2011	2,350	1,520	719
2012	2,450	1,568	832
2013	2,470	1,618	803
2014	2,734	1,587	970
2015	2,811	1,690	1,053
2016	2,678	1,707	933
2017	2,716	1,622	1,052
2018	2,668	1,604	1,015
2019	2,620	1,550	901
2020	2,581	1,552	964
2021	2,374	1,422	890
2022	2,258	1,355	846
2023	2,117	1,205	869

The 'All Schools' figures include pupils in special and nursery schools, and pupil referral units.

Source: Research & Statistics Unit Pupil Survey

Table 1 and figure 2 illustrate that the overall numbers of Portuguese pupils attending Lambeth schools generally rose year on year from 1,531 in 2002 to a high point of 2,811 in 2015. However, since then there has been a gradual decline in numbers to the current figure of 2,117. Most of this decline has been reflected in the primary cohort, with numbers down year on year to their current figure of 1,205. Despite the aforementioned decline, the secondary cohort has more than doubled from 367 pupils in 2003 to 869 in 2023.

**Figure 2. Number of Portuguese Pupils in Lambeth Schools (2003-2023)**



## **The Dataset**

The sample consisted of pupils who completed National Curriculum Assessment tests at the end of KS1, KS2, and KS4. In addition, all the LA's schools were asked to provide details of their pupils' backgrounds such as name, date of birth, sex, ethnic background, free school meal eligibility, date of admission or mobility data and level of fluency in English for contextual analysis. Where available we also drew evidence from national data published by the Department of Families and Education (DfE).

## **Measures of Performance**

It is important to note that in the English education system, pupils aged 5 to 11 years are taught National Curriculum subjects and are tested in English, mathematics and science. These tests are age dependent and divided into two key stages: KS1 and KS2. They are intended to show whether children have reached the National Curriculum learning targets standard which range between Key Stage 1 (KS1) and Key Stage 2 (KS2).

As of 2016, KS1 results are no longer reported using levels and have been replaced by scaled scores. Scaled scores are based on the total number of marks a pupil receives in a test or teacher assessment i.e. their 'raw' score, and this score is then translated into a scaled score using a conversion table. A scaled score of 100 will always represent the 'expected standard'.

Scaled scores enable results to be reported consistently from one year to the next, and therefore maintain their meaning over time so that two pupils achieving the same scaled score in different years will have demonstrated the same attainment.

The next section examines the achievement of Portuguese students in Lambeth schools at the end of KS1, KS2, and GCSE. Two methodological approaches are used. Firstly, the study looks at the pattern of the performance in the LA to establish the achievement of Portuguese pupils in Lambeth schools compared to the other main ethnic groups in the UK. This is followed by detailed data analysis of factors affecting the performance of Portuguese pupils. The main questions posed are:

- How well do Portuguese pupils perform in Lambeth schools?
- What are the differences in level of attainment at the end of KS1, KS2, and GCSE between schools?
- What are the factors influencing performance?



## 4. THE ACHIEVEMENT OF PORTUGUESE PUPILS IN LAMBETH SCHOOLS

### Introduction

The issue of Portuguese underachievement is complicated by lack of identification of Portuguese pupils within data. Broadly speaking, Portuguese pupils are found within the wider definition of 'Other White' in national level data. As a result of this lack of data there are limitations in past research into Portuguese underachievement in British schools. The absence of national comparative data which identifies patterns of children of Portuguese origin, places serious constraints on affecting targeting policy and practice developments at national and local level. It is also important to note that some LAs' Portuguese populations are very small and so any percentages are prone to large fluctuations.

Somali and Polish results relate to language data, as opposed to defined ethnic groups (and only the former can be defined as an ethnic group). However, as both form large groups in Lambeth nowadays they are included in the ethnicity tables for comparative purposes.

### KS1 and KS2 Trend Evidence

Despite the lack of national data on Portuguese pupil achievement, since 1998 Lambeth has collected data on this group which has provided an interesting example in research evidence. The following section outlines outcomes and trends for Portuguese pupils and other ethnic groups within Lambeth over the past nine years.

**Table 2. KS1 Attainment by Ethnic Background (2013-2023)**

Ethnic Group	Key Stage 1 Average (Reading, Writing, Maths)									
	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2022	2023	
African	77%	79%	81%	74%	78%	78%	77%	69%	67%	
<i>Somali</i>	72%	76%	78%	75%	77%	74%	75%	71%	63%	
Black Other	72%	74%	86%	71%	71%	66%	71%	57%	66%	
Caribbean	71%	73%	76%	71%	70%	73%	68%	55%	54%	
<i>Polish</i>	77%	78%	82%	72%	86%	79%	82%	73%	76%	
Portuguese	62%	64%	62%	63%	61%	69%	67%	59%	58%	
White British	83%	87%	86%	83%	85%	83%	84%	82%	82%	
White Other	78%	78%	80%	74%	79%	77%	80%	72%	72%	
<b>Lambeth -all</b>	<b>75%</b>	<b>78%</b>	<b>79%</b>	<b>75%</b>	<b>77%</b>	<b>78%</b>	<b>76%</b>	<b>68%</b>	<b>68%</b>	
<b>National</b>	<b>75%</b>	<b>77%</b>	<b>79%</b>	<b>71%</b>	<b>73%</b>	<b>74%</b>	<b>73%</b>	<b>64%</b>	<b>66%</b>	

*Note: For KS1 from 2013-2015 the average is calculated using the teacher assessment outcomes at Level 2B+ in reading, writing and maths. There are no levels after 2015 and pupils are calculated on whether they have met the "expected" standard for their age group.*

Whilst 2016 cannot be compared to previous years because of the change from levels to "expected"; we can still compare relative gaps within the year groups. The performance of Somali pupils has also been included in this table (and the other key stage tables), and this group is a subset of the African data.

Of the major ethnic groups, Portuguese pupils have consistently been one of the lowest performing cohorts at KS1, and the relative gap with the LA hasn't narrowed appreciably. Their average result for the past two years has remained the same, with the gap to the highest achieving group (White British pupils) being 23 percentage points. This is wider than the 2019 pre-COVID gap of 17 points.

All groups saw a decline in their outcomes in 2022, no doubt due to the impact of COVID-19 on their learning. Caribbean pupils remain another low performing group. White British pupils are a consistently high performing cohort.

**Table 3. KS2 Attainment by Ethnic Background (2013-2023)**

Ethnic Group	Reading and maths average			RWM					
	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2022	2023
African	90%	90%	92%	60%	70%	69%	72%	60%	63%
<i>Somali</i>	92%	91%	92%	62%	71%	72%	68%	60%	63%
Black Other	91%	85%	94%	65%	67%	66%	61%	43%	55%
Caribbean	87%	86%	87%	51%	62%	57%	60%	47%	49%
<i>Polish</i>	98%	95%	94%	58%	62%	80%	78%	70%	84%
Portuguese	88%	85%	86%	43%	54%	55%	54%	52%	56%
White British	96%	95%	96%	79%	80%	82%	80%	77%	78%
White Other	92%	95%	92%	63%	71%	74%	74%	65%	73%
<b>Lambeth</b>	<b>90%</b>	<b>90%</b>	<b>92%</b>	<b>61%</b>	<b>70%</b>	<b>70%</b>	<b>71%</b>	<b>61%</b>	<b>64%</b>
<b>National</b>	<b>86%</b>	<b>88%</b>	<b>88%</b>	<b>53%</b>	<b>61%</b>	<b>64%</b>	<b>65%</b>	<b>59%</b>	<b>60%</b>

*From 2016 onwards there are no levels of assessment at KS2 with pupils calculated on whether they have met the “expected” standard for their age group.*

Prior to 2022 Portuguese pupils were consistently the lowest performing group at KS2. However, unlike some other groups, their post-COVID outcomes have not been so negatively affected, so they are no longer the lowest performing group in Lambeth. Their gap to the Lambeth RWM result has narrowed from 17 percentage points in 2019 to eight points in 202, with maths their strongest subject in 2023, being only one percentage point below the corresponding LA outcome. The difference in 2019 was 15 points.

The gap between the highest (White British) and lowest (Black Caribbean) achievers in 2023 was 29 percentage points.

**Table 3a KS2 Attainment by Ethnic Background (2022 & 2023)**

	2022				2023				RWM +/-
	Reading	Writ TA	Maths	RWM	Reading	Writ TA	Maths	RWM	
African	77%	71%	72%	60%	75%	75%	79%	63%	+3%
<i>Somali</i>	76%	83%	87%	60%	77%	72%	80%	63%	+3%
Black Other	63%	57%	57%	43%	68%	62%	72%	55%	+12%
Caribbean	70%	64%	58%	47%	67%	64%	62%	49%	+2%
<i>Polish</i>	84%	76%	85%	70%	87%	86%	92%	84%	+14%
Portuguese	71%	67%	73%	52%	73%	69%	76%	56%	+4%
White British	87%	83%	85%	77%	88%	85%	85%	78%	+1%
White Other	79%	73%	81%	65%	81%	79%	85%	73%	+8%
<b>Lambeth</b>	<b>77%</b>	<b>72%</b>	<b>74%</b>	<b>61%</b>	<b>77%</b>	<b>74%</b>	<b>77%</b>	<b>64%</b>	<b>+3%</b>
<b>National</b>	<b>75%</b>	<b>69%</b>	<b>71%</b>	<b>59%</b>	<b>73%</b>	<b>72%</b>	<b>73%</b>	<b>60%</b>	<b>+1%</b>

The performance of African pupils has been on or around the borough average every year since 2013, including 2023. African pupils comprise a third of the major ethnicities, with 63% at the expected standard in RWM compared to White British at 78%. The latter continue to be a high achieving group and have positively widened the gap to the overall Lambeth outcomes. Caribbean pupils, generally a lower performing group, were 15 percentage points below the borough average in RWM this year. This is an increase over their pre-COVID gap of 11 points in 2019.

## GCSE Trend Evidence

In 2022/23, qualifications returned to pre-pandemic standards. Performance measures that are based on qualification results will reflect this and cannot be directly compared to measures from 2021/2022.

**Table 4. English and Maths 9 to 4/A\*-C Attainment by Ethnic Background (2016 – 2023)**

	2016	2017	2018	2019	2022	2023	+/- 19-23
African	66%	61%	65%	64%	75%	69%	+5%
<i>Somali</i>	81%	60%	78%	59%	67%	67%	+8%
Black Other	62%	53%	62%	37%	57%	51%	+14%
Caribbean	45%	50%	43%	47%	52%	48%	+1%
<i>Polish</i>	68%	56%	76%	78%	81%	86%	+8%
Portuguese	59%	58%	47%	50%	72%	62%	+12%
White British	67%	60%	63%	64%	65%	68%	+4%
White Other	71%	65%	71%	67%	71%	70%	+3%
<b>Lambeth</b>	<b>62%</b>	<b>60%</b>	<b>60%</b>	<b>59%</b>	<b>66%</b>	<b>63%</b>	<b>+4%</b>
<b>National</b>	<b>59%</b>	<b>59%</b>	<b>59%</b>	<b>60%</b>	<b>64%</b>	<b>61%</b>	<b>+1%</b>

*From 2017 the grading system changed from alpha to numerical, so grade 9 to 4 is the equivalent to A\* to C. Results remain comparable year on year.*

Contrary to the outcomes seen at KS1 and KS2, Portuguese pupils are not the lowest performing group at GCSE (generally Caribbean have been the lowest). Results have fluctuated over the six-year period but they have shown a significant 12 percentage point improvement over their pre-pandemic 2019 result. As a consequence they were only one percentage point below the overall Lambeth result in 2023.

African pupils achieved 69% at 9 to 4 in English and Maths this year. This is an increase from 2019 of five percentage points. Lambeth results increased overall at this measure in 2022 especially amongst EAL groups. The increasingly larger number of Polish pupils are above both Lambeth and the national average.

Of the largest ethnic cohorts in Lambeth, African pupils achieved 69% 9-4 grades, White Other 70%, and White British with 68%.

The progress measures of Attainment 8 and Progress 8 are shown in table 5 for the main ethnic groups. However, data for Portuguese pupils is not available nationally.

**Table 5. Attainment 8 and Progress 8 by Ethnic Background (2022 & 2023)**

	Attainment 8				Progress 8			
	Lambeth		National		Lambeth		National	
	2022	2023	2022	2023	2022	2023	2022	2023
African	48.1	45.9	50.8	48.6	-0.02	0.14	0.35	0.37
<i>Somali</i>	44.2	43.6	47.8	45.4	-0.30	-0.03	0.24	0.25
Black Other	41.4	40.6	46.8	44.2	-0.41	-0.33	0.11	0.09
Caribbean	37.8	35.5	41.6	39.9	-0.73	-0.58	-0.33	-0.24
<i>Polish</i>	58.3	59.6	51.3	49.9	0.68	1.02	0.57	0.51
Portuguese	49.8	45.4	46.0	43.2	0.28	0.38	0.47	0.44
White British	47.8	47.9	47.6	44.8	-0.38	-0.03	-0.18	-0.18
White Other	50.8	50.4	50.7	48.3	0.48	0.55	0.49	0.46
<b>Lambeth</b>	<b>46.3</b>	<b>44.7</b>	<b>47.2</b>	<b>44.6</b>	<b>-0.15</b>	<b>0.00</b>	<b>-0.06</b>	<b>-0.06</b>

The Attainment 8 measure is calculated using a pupil's best eight GCSE results, then averaging the results for the school, LA and different socio-economic factors. It is worth noting that if the Attainment 8 score is divided by 10 this gives an average grade. Therefore, an Attainment 8 score of 50 is equivalent to an average grade of 4 across all eight subjects.

In 2023 Portuguese pupils had a relatively high attainment score of 45.4 and were above both the Lambeth and national outcomes for all pupils.

In 2023 African pupils scored above the Lambeth average of 44.7 with an Attainment 8 score of 45.9. Of ethnic groups with a cohort more than 30 pupils, the highest attainers were Polish at 59.6, followed by White Other (which includes Polish) at 50.4, White British were 47.9, then African at 45.9.

The lowest were Caribbean with an Attainment 8 score of 35.5, below their peers nationally.

Progress 8 is a value-added measure of the progress a student makes from Key Stage 2 to Key Stage 4 by comparing the pupil's average grade and the average grade achieved by those pupils on a similar starting point/prior attainment. A positive score shows a higher progress than similar pupils. Likewise, a negative score shows lower progress. Nationally, Progress 8 is always statistically close to zero. When interpreting scores it is important to note that a score of +1.00 is equivalent to a pupil, institution or socio-economic group achieving on average one grade higher than pupils with a similar KS2 starting point nationally. Equally, -1.00 is one grade lower, +0.20 one fifth grade higher, -0.53 about a half grade lower etc.

Portuguese pupils had positive progress scores for both years shown, being the third highest in 2023 behind the Polish and 'White Other' groups. White British and Caribbean pupils showed negative progress scores for both years shown.

## 5. FACTORS AFFECTING ACHIEVEMENT OF PORTUGUESE HERITAGE PUPILS

Four factors that are helpful in understanding the effect of background factors on attainment of Portuguese pupils in schools were considered – eligibility for free school meals (FSM), gender, pupil mobility and level of fluency in English. The findings from table 6 confirm that Portuguese pupils are somewhat disadvantaged. For example, 41% of the KS2 cohort were eligible for FSM, and 39% at KS4 (GCSE).

**Table 6. Social Characteristics of Portuguese pupils in Lambeth schools by Key Stage Cohorts 2023**

Key Stages	Total Cohort	Gender		FSM (%)	EAL			Mobility rate
		Boys (%)	Girls (%)		Stage A-C Not fluent in English	Stage D Competent	Stage E Fully fluent in English	
Key Stage 1	70	51%	49%	31%	56%	21%	9%	21%
Key Stage 2	90	48%	52%	41%	28%	43%	26%	14%
Key Stage 4	74	57%	43%	39%	9%	20%	30%	0%

*EAL data was not available for 39% of the GCSE cohort this year.*

### Gender Differences and Achievement

Tables 7 and 8 repeat patterns established in earlier research, whereby girls tend to outperform boys (Demie, 2001; Gillborn and Gipps, 1996). Furthermore, when broken down by ethnic group, there are some notable differences (see table 8 overleaf).

**Table 7: Portuguese Pupils KS1, KS2, and GCSE Performance in Lambeth by Gender – 2023**

Key Stage		All Portuguese pupils	Boys	Girls	Gap
KS1 – at Expected Standard	Reading	59%	67%	50%	-17%
	Writing	64%	64%	44%	-20%
	Maths	61%	72%	50%	-22%
	Average	58%	68%	48%	-20%
KS2 – at Expected Standard	Reading	73%	58%	87%	+29%
	Writing TA	69%	53%	83%	+30%
	Maths	76%	77%	74%	-3%
	All RWM	56%	44%	66%	+22%
GCSE	9 to 4 English and Maths	62%	60%	66%	+6%
	Attainment 8	45.4	42.6	49.1	+6.5
	Progress 8	0.38	0.17	0.65	+0.48

For the Portuguese cohort, gender attainment outcomes in 2023 show boys performing better than girls at KS1, with girls generally doing better at KS2 and GCSE (with the notable exception of maths at KS2). At GCSE, progress rates indicate Portuguese girls achieved a grade higher on average than boys with a similar starting point at KS2.

Table 8 overleaf shows the outcomes by gender for other notable ethnic groups within Lambeth schools.

**Table 8: Lambeth KS2 and GCSE Performance by Ethnicity and Gender  
2018 to 2023**

Ethnic Group	Year	KS2 (Reading, Writing, Maths)				9 to 4 (A*-C) English and Maths			
		All	Boys	Girls	Gap	All	Boys	Girls	Gap
African	2018	69%	67%	72%	+5%	65%	62%	69%	+7%
	2019	72%	66%	78%	+12%	64%	57%	69%	+12%
	2022	60%	56%	63%	+7%	75%	67%	81%	+14%
	2023	63%	56%	69%	13%	69%	66%	71%	+5%
Somali	2018	72%	70%	74%	+4%	78%	74%	81%	+6%
	2019	68%	59%	75%	+16%	59%	47%	74%	+27%
	2022	60%	54%	64%	+10%	67%	62%	79%	+17%
	2023	63%	64%	61%	-3%	67%	69%	65%	-4%
Caribbean	2018	57%	54%	59%	+5%	43%	36%	49%	+14%
	2019	60%	55%	65%	+10%	47%	44%	50%	+6%
	2022	47%	39%	56%	+17%	52%	49%	54%	+5%
	2023	49%	46%	52%	+6%	48%	44%	51%	+7%
Portuguese	2018	55%	49%	61%	+12%	47%	47%	48%	+1%
	2019	55%	51%	60%	+9%	50%	45%	56%	+11%
	2022	52%	48%	55%	+7%	72%	71%	72%	+1%
	2023	56%	44%	66%	+22%	62%	60%	66%	+6%
Polish	2018	80%	70%	87%	+17%	76%	59%	90%	+31%
	2019	78%	85%	92%	+7%	78%	79%	76%	-3%
	2022	70%	70%	69%	-1%	81%	86%	74%	-12%
	2023	84%	82%	86%	+4%	86%	78%	94%	+16%
White British	2018	82%	76%	88%	+12%	63%	59%	66%	+7%
	2019	80%	82%	79%	-3%	64%	60%	70%	+10%
	2022	77%	75%	80%	+5%	65%	66%	64%	-2%
	2023	78%	73%	83%	+10%	68%	65%	71%	+6%
Lambeth	2018	70%	66%	74%	+8%	60%	57%	63%	+6%
	2019	71%	68%	74%	+6%	59%	55%	62%	+7%
	2022	61%	57%	65%	+8%	66%	64%	68%	+4%
	2023	64%	60%	68%	+8%	63%	60%	65%	+5%
National	2018	64%	61%	68%	+7%	59%	56%	64%	+8%
	2019	65%	60%	70%	+10%	60%	56%	64%	+8%
	2022	59%	54%	63%	+7%	64%	61%	67%	+6%
	2023	60%	56%	63%	+7%	61%	62%	67%	+5%

## Social Background and Achievement

The free school meals variable is often used as a proxy measure of the extent of social deprivation in pupils' backgrounds and has been linked to underachievement in a number of studies (Gillborn and Youdell, 2002; Demie, 2001). School level data demonstrates a clear relationship between the concentration of poverty levels in schools and tests and examination results.

The proportion of Portuguese pupils taking KS2 in 2023 who were eligible for free school meals (FSM) was 41%, and for the GCSE cohort it was 40%. Compared to the some of the ethnic groups shown in table 10 these figures are relatively low, and on a par with Lambeth at both key stages.

At KS1, Portuguese FSM pupils performed below their paid meal peers again this year, albeit the gaps were much lower. The reverse was true at KS2, with an eleven percentage point difference in favour of the free meals cohort in the RWM indicator, and 13 points in reading. At GCSE the free meals Portuguese cohort performed below their paid meal peers in all three indicators, with the gaps being greater this year.

**Table 9. Performance of Portuguese pupils by Free School Meal status (2022 & 2023)**

Key Stage		2022			2023		
		Free Meals	Paid Meals	Gap	Free Meals	Paid Meals	Gap
KS1 – Expected	Reading	58%	63%	-6%	59%	60%	-1%
	Writing	42%	60%	-18%	50%	57%	-7%
	Maths	50%	65%	-15%	59%	64%	-5%
	Average	50%	63%	-13%	56%	60%	-4%
KS2 – Expected	Reading	75%	69%	+6%	81%	68%	+13%
	Writing TA	70%	66%	+4%	73%	66%	+7%
	Maths	73%	74%	-1%	73%	77%	-4%
	RWM	58%	49%	+8%	62%	51%	+11%
GCSE	% 9-4 E&M	69%	73%	-4%	52%	69%	-17%
	Attainment 8	48.1	50.7	-2.6	40.8	48.3	-7.5
	Progress 8	0.40	0.22	+0.18	-0.15	0.72	-0.87

There are also some striking differences within the main ethnic groups when the data is further analysed by eligibility for free school meals. Table 10 shows that at GCSE, 58% of Caribbean pupils not eligible for free school meals achieved 9 to 4 in English and Maths, compared with 40% of pupils who were eligible; a gap of 18 percentage points. There was a much larger gap for White British pupils of 41 percentage points.

These findings underlines the importance of treating any measure of school or LA performance which does not include the influence of background factors such as social class and deprivation, with scepticism. As we have argued in the previous section, our analysis is not complete because of a lack of data on social class. Care must be taken in generalizing the results particularly of White British pupils from this study to a wider context.

**Table 10. Performance by Key Stage, FSM and Ethnic Background in Lambeth, 2023**

	KS2 Reading Writing Maths (% Expected)			9 to 4 English and Maths		
	% of pupils eligible	Eligible	Not Eligible	% of pupils eligible	Eligible	Not Eligible
African	56%	61%	66%	45%	64%	73%
<i>Somali</i>	57%	59%	67%	46%	61%	72%
Caribbean	56%	60%	76%	53%	40%	58%
Polish	14%	81%	88%	13%	78%	87%
Portuguese	41%	62%	51%	39%	52%	69%
White British	20%	70%	92%	27%	38%	79%
<b>Lambeth</b>	<b>41%</b>	<b>54%</b>	<b>72%</b>	<b>40%</b>	<b>52%</b>	<b>70%</b>

### English Language Acquisition and Achievement

Another important factor relating to ethnic background and Portuguese achievement is English fluency. For students to have access to the curriculum it is clear that they need to be fluent in the language of instruction. Some students of Portuguese heritage are fluent in English while others may not be.

A number of studies have explored the relationship between English fluency and pupil attainment. Demie and Strand (2005) examined the results at KS2 and GCSE whilst at the same time controlling for age, gender, free school meals, ethnic background and mobility rate. The results indicated that, in general terms, pupils who spoke English as an additional language scored significantly lower than those who spoke English as first language or were fluent in English.

Tables 11 and 12 give the average KS1 and KS2 performance by level of fluency in English for a range of ethnic groups. Overall, Portuguese pupils' performance at KS1 and KS2 increases as the stage of proficiency in English increases. For example, bilingual speakers who were classed as competent in English (stage D) were 20 percentage points above the Lambeth average at KS1. At KS2 the stage E fluent cohort were well above the Lambeth result, with an 18 point gap in their favour.

However, due to the small cohort sizes involved results can fluctuate year on year. The lack of fluency data from some schools can also limit the validity of the outcomes shown below.

**Table 11. KS1 Average Attainment by Ethnicity and Fluency in English – 2023**

Proficiency	African		Polish		Somali		Portuguese	
	Cohort	Result	Cohort	Result	Cohort	Result	Cohort	Result
Stages A to C – Non-Fluent	228	58%	45	65%	59	57%	39	51%
Stage D - Competent	73	80%	14	98%	9	85%	15	78%
Stage E - Fluent	53	89%	9	96%	6	94%	6	78%
English Only	143	67%	0	n/a	0	n/a	4	25%
<b>All Pupils</b>	<b>539</b>	<b>67%</b>	<b>71</b>	<b>76%</b>	<b>86</b>	<b>63%</b>	<b>70</b>	<b>58%</b>



**Table 12. KS2 attaining Reading, Writing and Maths by Ethnicity and Fluency in English – 2023**

Proficiency	African		Polish		Somali		Portuguese	
	Cohort	Result	Cohort	Result	Cohort	Result	Cohort	Result
Stages A to C – Non-Fluent	126	48%	23	43%	44	49%	25	32%
Stage D - Competent	180	66%	45	93%	46	67%	39	62%
Stage E - Fluent	170	78%	39	97%	24	65%	23	74%
English Only	114	52%	0	n/a	0	n/a	1	0%
<b>All Pupils</b>	<b>605</b>	<b>63%</b>	<b>111</b>	<b>84%</b>	<b>119</b>	<b>63%</b>	<b>90</b>	<b>56%</b>

Analysis of GCSE results (see table 13) also shows that fluency in English continues to have an influence on the performance of pupils with EAL. The stage E fluent cohort were above the Lambeth figure this year by eleven percentage points, with outcomes also favourable in pupils who were competent (although the relatively small cohort sizes need to be taken into account).

We do not have access to some school's fluency data, so treat the above information with caveats. For example, fluency data was not available for 39% of the GCSE Portuguese cohort in 2023.

In 2017 the DfE introduced Proficiency in English as a national measure. The results indicated that pupils who were at the early stages of proficiency achieved significantly lower outcomes than those who spoke English as a first language or were fluent in English.

**Table 13. 9 to 4 English & Maths Attainment by Ethnicity and Proficiency in English – 2023**

Proficiency	African		Somali		Polish		Portuguese	
	Cohort	Result	Cohort	Result	Cohort	Result	Cohort	Result
Stages A to C – Non-Fluent	16	19%	4	0%	24	86%	7	57%
Stage D - Competent	42	64%	11	45%	17	76%	15	67%
Stage E - Fluent	203	74%	50	70%	18	89%	22	73%
English Only	106	73%	0	n/a	0	n/a	1	0%
<b>All Pupils</b>	<b>585</b>	<b>69%</b>	<b>99</b>	<b>67%</b>	<b>69</b>	<b>86%</b>	<b>74</b>	<b>62%</b>

There are also some striking differences within the main ethnic groups when the KS2 and GCSE data is further analysed by levels of fluency in English. Tables 11 to 13 show that performance for all main ethnic groups increases when combined with improved English acquisition amongst the bilingual cohort. These findings support a number of studies that have explored the relationship between English fluency and pupil attainment. Demie and Strand (2005) examined the results at KS2 and GCSE whilst at the same time controlling for age, gender, free school meals, ethnic background and mobility rate.

These findings offer much encouragement for policy makers and school improvement practitioners. They demonstrate that once the language barrier is overcome, it is possible to attain good levels of achievement for all key stages.

## Pupil Mobility and Achievement

It is now widely recognised that mobility can have an adverse effect on educational attainment. Mobile pupils are those who join or leave a school at a point other than at the age they would normally start or finish their education at a school. Her Majesty's Chief Inspector reported that high pupil mobility was one of the greatest problems, if not the greatest problem that any school can face.

**Table 14. Attainment of Portuguese Pupils by Mobility 2022 & 2023**

Key Stage		2022			2023		
		Non-mobile	Mobile	Gap	Non-mobile	Mobile	Gap
KS2 % expected	Reading	74%	53%	-21%	78%	46%	-32%
	Writing TA	71%	41%	-30%	75%	31%	-44%
	Maths	75%	59%	-17%	79%	54%	-25%
	RWM	54%	35%	-19%	61%	23%	-38%
GCSE % achieving	9-4 EM	72%	67%	-5%	64%	0%	-64%
	Attainment 8	50.9	35.4	-15.5	45.8	28.5	-17.3
	Progress 8	0.39	-2.14	-2.53	0.37	0.78	+0.41

At both key stages non-mobile Portuguese pupils were more likely than their mobile peers of the same ethnicity to gain the expected level, with the differences being stark at KS2. Tables 14 and 15 illustrate this point with, on average, Portuguese pupils who spent all of KS2 in the same school achieving better results than the new arrivals.

However, at GCSE it should be borne in mind that the mobile cohort always constitutes a small number (six pupils in 2022 and only two in 2023).

**Table 15. Portuguese Pupil Attainment by Length of Time Spent in School, 2022 & 2023**

Key stage	Mobility by Length of Time Spent in School	Number		Performance	
		2022	2023	2022	2023
KS2 – expected standard RWM	Joined in Year 3 or before	118	77	54%	78%
	Joined in Year 4&5	14	11	36%	45%
	Joined in Year 6	3	2	33%	50%
9-4 English and Maths	Joined in Year 7	75	72	72%	64%
	Joined in Year 8&9	5	2	80%	0%
	Joined in Year 10	0	0	n/a	n/a
	Joined in Year 11	1	0	0%	n/a

## 6. CONCLUSIONS AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS

### Conclusions

In this study we examined educational inequalities and the underachievement of Portuguese pupils in schools. The general conclusion from the evidence is that Portuguese pupils are often the lowest achieving of all the main ethnic groups, with the differences being stark in some instances. Of particular concern is how they have remained in this position for some time now.

Table 16 illustrates that Portuguese pupils have narrowed the gap to the overall Lambeth result at KS2, albeit they still remain below (eight percentage points below in 2023). At GCSE the picture is more encouraging, with the Portuguese cohort being on a par with the Lambeth outcome in 2023.

**Table 16. Portuguese KS2 and GCSE attainment, 2016-2023**

Year	KS2 (RWM % expected standard)			GCSE (% 4-9 in E&M)		
	Portuguese	Lambeth All pupils	Gap	Portuguese	Lambeth All pupils	Gap
2016	43%	62%	-19%	59%	62%	-3%
2017	54%	70%	-16%	58%	60%	-2%
2018	55%	70%	-15%	47%	60%	-13%
2019	54%	71%	-17%	50%	59%	-9%
2022	52%	61%	-9%	72%	66%	+6%
2023	56%	64%	-8%	62%	63%	-1%
<b>2016-2023</b>	<b>+13%</b>	<b>+2%</b>	-	<b>+3%</b>	<b>+1%</b>	-
<b>2022-2023</b>	<b>+4%</b>	<b>+3%</b>	-	<b>-10%</b>	<b>-3%</b>	-

There is a need for strategies to be developed to raise levels of achievement of this group and to reverse trends in the LA and at national level. A number of factors were identified in the underachievement of Portuguese pupils, including the language barrier, teachers' low expectations, stereotyping, exclusion, lack of awareness of Portuguese culture and history, institutional racism, inappropriate curriculum and the failure of the National Curriculum to reflect adequately the needs of a diverse and multi-ethnic society.

### Policy Implications

The challenge from this research for national policy makers is that both the LA and government need to recognise the underachievement of Portuguese pupils as an important part of raising standards in schools. Unfortunately it is an unacknowledged problem at national level and there are no specific initiatives to address the situation. The biggest obstacles to raising Portuguese achievement is the 'colour blind' approach which has put the group at a disadvantage and the failure of the National Curriculum to adequately reflect the needs of a diverse, multi-ethnic society (Gillborn 2002; MacPherson 1999). All government education reform acts and white papers failed to explore the specific needs of Portuguese and other new emigrants from the European Community.

## **Implications for Future Research**

The LA data shows that Portuguese children are underachieving in British schools. 'This not a new phenomenon, but one that cannot allow to continue. Effective schools that have been dealing with the issues hold the key to the way forward' (DFES, 2003:3). The body of available research suggests that there is lack of research into factors that contribute to educational success and high academic achievement among ethnic minority groups in United Kingdom. There has been also little research into how the experience of successful schools may be disseminated within the LA to address underachievement in other similar schools. The first step in answering these questions is to identify factors that contribute to their success. Recent research into other ethnic groups including Somali, Black African and Black Caribbean by the LA (McKenely et al 2003; Demie et al 2004 and 2007) has identified characteristics of successful schools and discussed in detail these features including strong and purposeful leadership, high expectation for all pupils and teachers, effective use of data, effective teaching and learning, and developing an inclusive curriculum that meets the needs of underachieving groups.

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