

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

RESEARCH AND STATISTICS UNIT
LAMBETH EDUCATION, LEARNING & SKILLS
LONDON SW9 7QE

January 2024

Enquiries to: Feyisa Demie, Robert Tong, Rebecca Butler, James McDonald, and Andy Hau.

Contents

1. INTRODUCTION	1
2. AIMS AND OBJECTIVES OF THE RESEARCH	5
3. THE LA CONTEXT	5
Number of Somali Pupils in Lambeth Schools	5
The Dataset	7
Measures of Performance	8
4. THE ACHIEVEMENT OF SOMALI PUPILS IN SCHOOLS	9
KS1 and KS2 Trend Evidence	9
GCSE Evidence	11
5. FACTORS AFFECTING ACHIEVEMENT OF SOMALI HERITAGE PUPILS	
Social Characteristics of Somali Pupils in Schools	13
Gender Differences and Achievement	14
Social Background and Achievement	16
English Language Acquisition and Achievement	17
Pupil Mobility and Achievement	19
6. CONCLUSIONS AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS	20
References	21

1. INTRODUCTION

The Background to Somali Communities in Britain

In recent years considerable attention has been devoted to the issue of underachievement of Black pupils in British schools. The first official recognition of the problem was The Rampton Report (Rampton 1981), the interim report of the Committee of Inquiry into the Education of Children of Ethnic Minority Groups. This report, and further research carried out in the 1980s and 1990s, focused specifically on the relative underachievement of Black Caribbean and African pupils (Mortimore et al, 1988; Nuttall et al, 1989; Kendall, 1998; Gillborn and Gipps, 1996; Demie, 2001; Demie, 2005).

In contrast to the above situation, research into the educational attainment of Somali children in British schools remains scant. It has also been noted by several commentators that little is known about the actual size of the Somali population resident in Britain, with the 2001 census figure for Somali-born London inhabitants alone being less than half the figure estimated by some recent studies (Harris, 2004). The 2001 census records 43,532 people born in Somalia being resident in the UK. But this is only a percentage of the full Somali population, as it does not take account of UK-born children of Somali parentage. A survey in 2004 also suggests there was a low level of participation by the Somali community in the 2001 census (survey results were reported orally at a Somali Community Meeting held at the House of Commons, 29th March 2004)¹. Estimates vary considerably as to the actual number of Somalis in the UK, with one estimate put at 250,000 in 2002 (Ioan Lewis, Liberation Meeting, London, 26th November 2002).

Abdul Diriye, in his 2006 article entitled 'The Ticking Bomb: The Educational Underachievement of Somali Children in British Schools', believes:

'They (Somalis) remain largely ignored and their needs neglected by the local and national policy-makers, largely because of the failure to recognise Somali as a distinct ethnic group'

This apparent lack of recognition seems paradoxical considering Somalis have been present in British society since the late 19th century, and were one of the first Black communities to settle in the UK. One reason for this put forward by other commentators and researchers is the 'social invisibility' of Somali people. Hermione Harris explains this in her 2004 study entitled *'The Somali Community in the UK: What we know and how we know it'* by comparing Somalis to the African-Caribbean community in Britain:

'Both groups suffer racism, but African-Caribbeans are perceived to be part of British society...It is not the volume of research on African-Caribbeans (although this is considerable) that gives them a public presence, but their high visibility in a wider society' (Harris 2004, pg.13)

She goes on to explain:

'Somalis too are rendered visible by their dress. But the social distance between Somalis and...British culture increases their isolation. There is therefore a dissonance between the amount of information which actually exists, and what is believed to be known' (Harris 2004, pg.13)

¹ The source for this survey comment is Hermione Harris' 2004 paper *'The Somali Community in the UK: What we know and how we know it'*

As a partial counter to the earlier statement by Diriye, Harris claims there is already a wealth of information available on the Somali community:

'ICAR (The Information Centre about Asylum and Refugees in the UK) has identified 139 substantial items on Somalis in the UK published since 1990...Many locally-produced reports are never widely circulated, and new material is emerging all the time' (Harris 2004, pg.10)

But she also qualifies this later on in her report by commenting that it was the civil war in the 1980s, and the resultant diaspora of the indigenous Somalian population, that caused the Somali community in Britain to become a focus of concern. It was this wave of migration that set the current pattern of Somali settlement in the UK. It is important to note that the large increase in refugees who entered the UK in the 1980s and 1990s was mostly made up of women and children, some coming to join their husbands but the majority being single-parent families. This changed the makeup of Somali communities from being single male workers (who were present from the previous waves of immigration) to refugee communities with large numbers of children and young adults.

In recent years' the nature of Somali immigration to the UK has changed from being composed of refugees leaving Somalia itself, to those leaving other host countries (such as Sweden, Norway and Holland) for the UK. A major motivation for this is to join family members and settled Somalian communities in Britain. As Harris states:

'The UK hosts the largest Somali community outside Somalia, and the UK is described by Somalis as a 'meeting point', a 'more intercultural society' than many of the (European) states Somalis leave behind' (Harris 2004, pg.24)

The Educational Context

Somali culture places an emphasis upon a high level of self-reliance and resourcefulness when faced with difficulties or obstacles, which some researchers have made pains to note. For example, Ali and Jones (2000) in their report *'Meeting the educational needs of Somali pupils in Camden schools'* offset underachievement with some positive comments made by teachers in regard to their Somali pupils. As a general comment towards all refugee pupils, they state:

'...most teachers who have refugee pupils in their class do not see them as problem pupils. Individual refugee pupils...may have various learning and other educational difficulties and needs, but they also bring into the classroom a range of opportunities and perspectives that can enrich the learning and understandings of all who are working there' (Ali and Jones 2000, pg.6)

But taking these positive viewpoints into account, Somali pupils still face a range of obstacles to learning that they can find very difficult to surmount – hence the general trend of underachievement. As a background factor to be considered in this debate, Diriye (*The Ticking Bomb, 2006*) makes the point that when a child comes to the UK from Somalia they are placed in classes based on their age group – and are immediately at a disadvantage to their peers in terms of their learning experience. It can also be the case that new arrivals to the UK have no experience of writing in any language whatsoever, as Somali home-based literacy tends to be largely oral and not written.

Diriye then goes on to explain four possible *'roots of underachievement'* :

1. Trauma – the civil war after-effects. Many of the children in British schools may not have experienced the actual war, but they still grew up in a long process of unsettlement which finally brought them to the UK.
2. Overcrowding. Many Somali families live in deprived neighbourhoods with overcrowded accommodation. The result is children have little or no space to organise their learning material, and excessive noise levels are not conducive to learning either.
3. Racism. Despite claims about diversity and racial equality in the media and among educational professionals, teachers are a part of a wider community which, as every community, has cultural prejudices and racist attitudes.
4. Language and literacy. The idea of bilingualism is new to Somalis. Where parents are unable to speak English themselves (which is the majority) this limits their ability to assist their children with their studies. This might also diminish Somali parents will to visit the school and speak to members of staff about their children.

By addressing some of the points above, local authorities have come up with a range of resources and initiatives to assist with the issue of Somali underachievement. For example, in the case of Lambeth, schools already have access to support for Somali pupils as part of EMAG (Ethnic Minority Achievement Grant) funding, which is used to assist underperforming ethnic groups and pupils with low levels of English fluency. In addition to this, the following support is also available:

- A primary EAL programme in 14 schools, including those with significant numbers of Somali pupils
- Additional allocation of Bilingual Teaching Assistant support from EMAT (the Ethnic Minority Achievement Team) for newly arrived Somali pupils, to help with induction and home to school liaison
- Free interpreting and translation service to help communication between parents and schools
- Training courses for primary teachers on issues relating to Somali pupils
- The imminent appointment (at the time of writing this report) of a Somali Education Officer to be part of EMAT. The post will include working with Lambeth's Somali communities, as well as supporting pupils and schools

In another London borough, Hounslow started the Somali enrichment project in 2003, which aims to provide positive role models from the local Somali community for 11-16 year old Somalis, as well as raising the motivation and self-esteem of this group of pupils.²

In their report to Camden LEA, Ali and Jones (2000)³ cite a range of strategies Camden schools have adopted in order to raise Somali attainment. These include:

- The employment of specialised staff e.g. Somali link workers
- Support for and encouragement of Somali language classes
- A clear and owned school policy for refugee and asylum seeking children
- A pastoral system that is responsive to the particular needs of Somali pupils
- Good home/school/community links, especially getting Somali parents involved with the school as much as possible
- Focused INSET for mainstream teachers, particularly newly qualified teachers, on how to best support their bilingual learners
- Maintaining an INSET programme that keeps all staff up to date with the issues involved with increasing Somali achievement

They go on to make the following important statement:

'Academic achievement is monitored with the usual range of measures, exams, SATs and GCSE results. But educational achievement is more than the measurable academic. Social skills and behaviour are also monitored through observation outside, in lessons, in the canteen and through communication with the pastoral team and families. This was seen as important for Somali pupils who, with other refugee pupils, have a range of adjustment issues to cope with in their new environment' (Ali and Jones 2000, pg.10)

To summarise, Somali pupils face many difficulties and challenges to learning, but together with the Somali community, schools and local authorities have been endeavouring to address these issues in order to provide Somali pupils with the education they deserve in order for them all to reach their full potential.

² Source: 'Tackling Underachievement', October 2003, DfES

³ Ali, E and Jones, C, (2000) *Meeting the Educational Needs of Somali Pupils in Camden Schools*, Institute of Education, London University.

2. AIMS AND OBJECTIVES OF THE RESEARCH

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

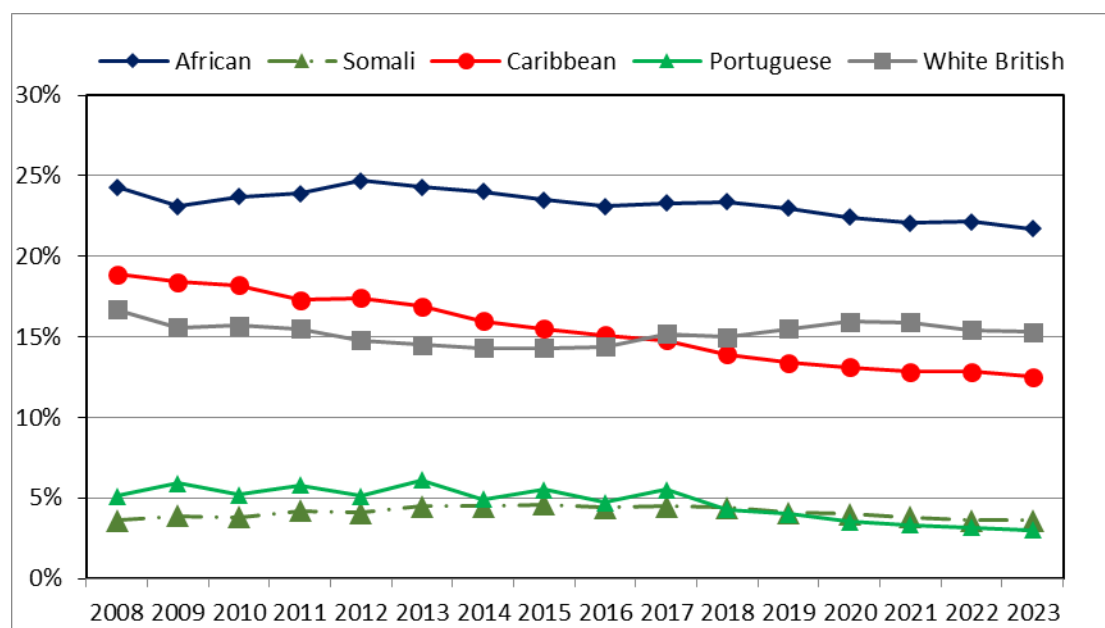
- To study the achievement of Somali heritage pupils at the end of Key Stage 1, Key Stage 2, and GCSE.
- To examine the school experiences of Somali heritage pupils.
- To identify reasons for underachievement.

3. THE LA CONTEXT

Number of Somali 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%).

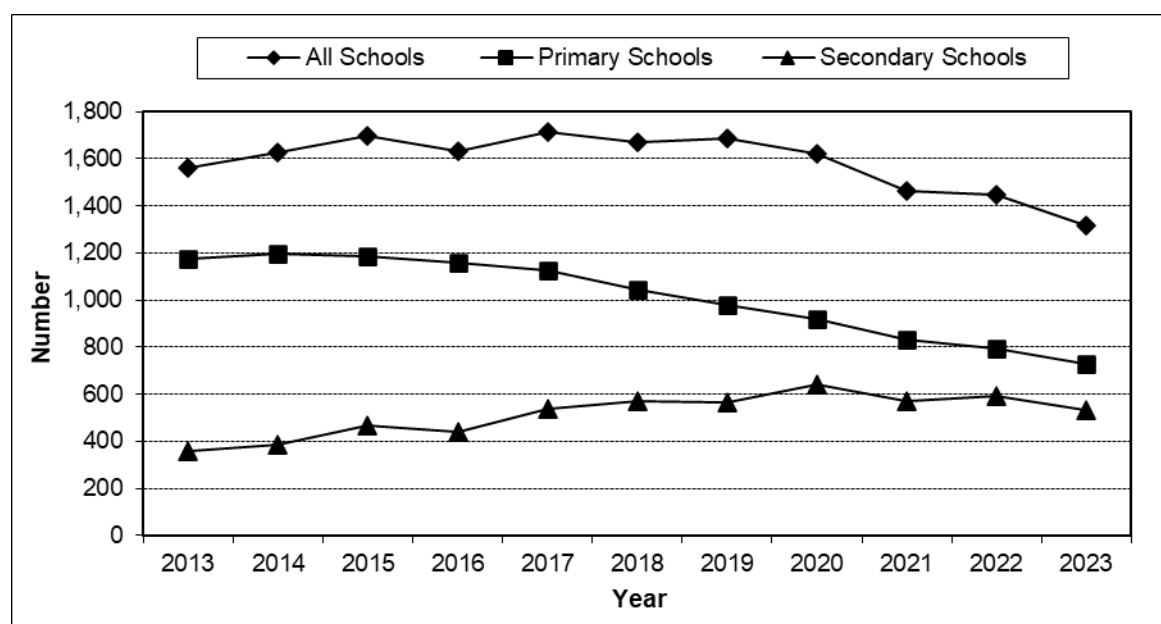
Figure 1. Changes in the School Composition in the LA by Main Ethnic Group



*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.

Figure 2. Number of Somali Pupils in Lambeth Schools (2013-2023)



	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
All Schools	1,563	1,625	1,699	1,630	1,716	1,672	1,689	1,621	1,464	1,446	1,318
Primary	1,173	1,197	1,185	1,159	1,128	1,046	979	920	833	793	728
Secondary	361	386	466	439	536	571	564	641	573	590	534

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

Source: R&S Unit Pupil Survey and DfE Schools Census January returns

Figure 2 above clearly illustrates that the Somali pupil population in all Lambeth schools was increasing up until 2017. Since then it has been declining, with a marked drop in numbers in 2021, the majority of which has been reflected in the primary cohort.

Table 1. Ethnic Background of the Lambeth School Population, 2013-2023 (% of total)

Ethnic Group	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
African*	24.3	24.0	24.5	23.4	23.2	22.4	23.0	22.4	22.1	22.2	21.7
Somali	4.5	4.5	4.6	4.6	4.5	4.4	4.4	4.3	3.9	3.6	3.6
Caribbean	16.9	16.0	15.7	15.3	14.5	13.9	13.4	13.1	12.8	12.8	12.5
Portuguese	6.1	4.9	4.9	4.7	4.6	4.3	4.0	3.5	3.3	3.2	3.0
White British	14.5	14.3	14.3	14.6	14.9	15.0	16.0	16.0	15.9	15.4	15.3

**Includes Somali pupil statistics*

Table 1 shows the four main ethnic groups (with Somali as a sub-set of African) who have previously been identified as underperforming in Lambeth schools. In general terms the African cohort has remained at a similar level over the past eleven years, and constitutes the single largest ethnic group in Lambeth. The Caribbean cohort has been decreasing year on year, with White British pupils showing a slight decline in the intervening years, but from 2015 onwards started to increase again. The Portuguese and Somali cohorts are relatively small in comparison, with both remaining static over the past two years. This could be due to issues in collecting and validating the data, rather than a fall in numbers in real terms.

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, gender, 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 for Education (DfE).

Measures of Performance

It is important to note that in the English education system, pupils aged 5 to 16 years are taught National Curriculum subjects and are tested in English, mathematics and science. These tests are age dependent and divided into four key stages: KS1, KS2 and KS4. 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 Somali 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 Somali 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 African pupils. The main questions posed are:

- How well do African 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 SOMALI PUPILS IN LAMBETH SCHOOLS

KS1 and KS2 Trend Evidence

Despite the lack of national data on Somali pupil achievement, in Lambeth we were able to identify such pupils using the language descriptor in the Lambeth Annual Pupil Survey (and now via the DfE Schools Census). The following section outlines outcomes and trends for Somali pupils and other ethnic groups within Lambeth over the past seven years.

Table 2. Average Key Stage 1 Attainment by Ethnic Group (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%	
Lambeth -all	75%	78%	79%	75%	77%	78%	76%	68%	68%	
National	75%	77%	79%	71%	73%	74%	73%	64%	66%	

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 average result for Somali pupils was below 70% for the first time this year, with the gap increasing when compared to the wider African cohort. Prior to this they had good outcomes, being above the Lambeth average in some instances.

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

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%
Lambeth	90%	90%	92%	61%	70%	70%	71%	61%	64%
National	86%	88%	88%	53%	61%	64%	65%	59%	60%

The DfE changed the KS2 tests in 2013 to no longer include an overall English level, so the reading and maths average is now shown here. Also, there are no levels after 2015 and pupils are calculated on whether they have met the “expected” standard for their age group.

Historically at KS2, Somali pupils have performed below the Lambeth result, plus the outcomes seen by the African cohort overall. However, significant improvement led them to equal or surpass the LA result in recent years.

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.

Portuguese continue to be a low performing group, and they were 8 percentage points below the borough average in 2023. 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%
Lambeth	77%	72%	74%	61%	77%	74%	77%	64%	+3%
National	75%	69%	71%	59%	73%	72%	73%	60%	+1%

For the Somali cohort, Reading and maths were jointly their strongest subject in 2023. Their writing results has fallen by eleven percentage points, when compared to the previous year.

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%
Lambeth	62%	60%	60%	59%	66%	63%	+4%
National	59%	59%	59%	60%	64%	61%	+1%

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.*

The performance of Somali pupils has fluctuated over the six-year period shown, with their highest result recorded in 2016. Despite a decline in attainment in 2019 they have improved by eight percentage points and were above the Lambeth and national outcomes in 2023.

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). 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%.

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
Lambeth	46.3	44.7	47.2	44.6	-0.15	0.00	-0.06	-0.06

The progress measures of Attainment 8 and Progress 8 are shown in table 5 for the main ethnic groups.

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.

Somali pupils had a slightly lower attainment 8 score this year when compared to 2022 and were similar to the overall Lambeth result.

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.

Nationally in 2023, African pupils had an Attainment 8 score of 48.6, which is above the Lambeth cohort's result.

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.

Somali pupils recorded negative progress 8 scores in both years, albeit the 2023 figure was -0.03. 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 SOMALI PUPILS

The four factors shown in table 6 are helpful in understanding achievement patterns of Somali pupils in Lambeth schools. The data confirms that Somali pupils are a disadvantaged group. For example, half of the Somali cohorts at KS1 and KS2 were eligible for FSM, and 46% of GCSE pupils. The national figures for FSM eligibility are considerably lower at each key stage.

Table 6 Social Characteristics of Somali 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	86	53%	47%	51%	69%	10%	7%	26%
Key Stage 2	119	46%	54%	57%	37%	39%	20%	17%
Key Stage 4	99	48%	52%	46%	4%	11%	51%	6%

Gender Differences and Achievement

In general terms nationally, girls tend to outperform boys. In Lambeth this is also true for African and Caribbean pupils' at all key stages, however in recent years White British boys at GCSE performed above the level of girls (Demie et al 2006).

For the Somali cohort in 2023, boys generally outperformed girls at all key stages, or were at least on a par with them. The only notable exception being maths at KS1 where girls were four percentage points above. The largest gap in performance was in reading at KS1, with boys ten percentage points above the girls.

Table 7: Somali Pupils KS1, KS2, and GCSE Performance in Lambeth by Gender, 2023

Key Stage		All Somali pupils	Boys	Girls	Gap
KS1 – at Expected Standard	Reading	67%	73%	63%	-10%
	Writing	57%	58%	57%	-1%
	Maths	65%	63%	67%	+4%
	Average	63%	64%	62%	-2%
KS2 – at Expected Standard	Reading	77%	76%	77%	+1%
	Writing TA	72%	71%	72%	+1%
	Maths	80%	80%	78%	-2%
	All RWM	63%	64%	61%	-3%
GCSE	9 to 4 English and Maths	67%	69%	65%	-4%
	Attainment 8	43.6	44.7	42.6	-2.1
	Progress 8	-0.03	0.06	-0.11	-0.16

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 indicator is often used as a proxy measure 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 Somali pupils taking KS2 in 2023 who were eligible for free school meals was 57%, and for the GCSE cohort it was 46% (see table 6 on page 13).

At KS2 the FSM Somali cohort performed above their paid meal peers, with the largest gap in maths at 13 percentage points. However, the reverse was true this year at both KS2 and GCSE. FSM Somali pupils were eight percentage points below their peers in the RWM combined indicator at KS2, and 11 points in the 9-4 E&M indicator at GCSE.

Table 9. Performance of Somali pupils by Free School Meal status, 2023

Key Stage		All Somali pupils	Free Meals	Paid Meals	Gap
KS1 – at Expected Standard	Reading	67%	70%	68%	+2%
	Writing	57%	64%	53%	+11%
	Maths	65%	73%	60%	+13%
	Average	63%	69%	60%	+9%
KS2 – at Expected Standard	Reading	77%	72%	82%	-10%
	Writing TA	72%	63%	82%	-19%
	Maths	80%	75%	84%	-9%
	All RWM	63%	59%	67%	-8%
GCSE	9 to 4 English and Maths	67%	61%	72%	-11%
	Attainment 8	43.6	41.9	45.1	-3.2
	Progress 8	-0.03	-0.09	0.03	+0.12

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.

This finding 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%
Lambeth	41%	54%	72%	40%	52%	70%

English Language Acquisition and Achievement

Another important factor relating to ethnic background and Somali 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 Somali 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 pupils who spoke English as an additional language scored significantly lower than those who spoke English as first language or were fluent in English.

Table 11 and 12 gives the average KS1 and KS2 performance by level of fluency in English. For Somali pupils at both key stages, as fluency in English improves so does educational achievement. This pattern is also reflected in the wider bilingual African cohort.

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. Average Key Stage 1 Attainment of Somali Pupils by Stage of English Fluency, 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%
All Pupils	539	67%	71	76%	86	63%	70	58%

Table 12. Average Key Stage 2 Attainment of Somali Pupils by Stage of English Fluency, 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%
All Pupils	605	63%	111	84%	119	63%	90	56%

Analysis of GCSE results also shows that fluency in English continues to have an influence on the performance of pupils with EAL (see table 13 below). Outcomes for Somali pupils follow a linear upward improvement in line with the general expectation, however the small cohort sizes involved need to be borne in mind.

Tables 13. GCSE 9 to 4 grades inc E&M Attainment of Somali pupils by Stage of English Fluency, 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%
All Pupils	585	69%	99	67%	69	86%	74	62%

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 12 and 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.

The results indicated that pupils who were at the early stages of fluency achieved significantly lower outcomes than those who spoke English as a first language, or were fully fluent in English.

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 achievement. Mobile pupils in this context are defined as those who joined school at a point other than the start of the respective key stage. For example, at KS2 a pupil who joins in year 3 is deemed 'non-mobile', whereas a year 5 entrant is classed as 'mobile'. 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 17. Attainment of Somali Pupils by Mobility 2023

Key Stage		2023		
		Non-mobile	Mobile	Gap
KS2 % expected	Reading	77%	75%	-2%
	Writing TA	74%	60%	-14%
	Maths	80%	75%	-15%
	RWM	63%	60%	-3%
GCSE % achieving	A*-C (9 -4) EM	67%	67%	0%
	Attainment 8	44.2	38.1	-6.1
	Progress 8	-0.03	0.01	+0.04

Non-mobile Somali pupils were more likely than their mobile peers to gain the expected threshold at KS2, in line with the expectation. The mobile cohort at GCSE is typically small, and this year it constituted only four pupils, so no robust conclusions can be made.

CONCLUSIONS AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS

It is clear to see that Somali pupils have improved from an underperforming group in Lambeth some years ago at each stage of the National Curriculum, and at GCSE level. They continue to narrow the achievement gap to their peers and in recent years have begun to meet or exceed the Lambeth outcomes, which is something to celebrate.

One reason for historical Somali pupil underachievement is the language barrier. At KS1 and KS2 the vast majority of Somalis are not fluent in English, and this has been the case for some time. Whereas at GCSE the opposite is true, with the stage E fully fluent pupils forming the majority of the cohort each year.

Somali pupils also face other challenges, such as the very high proportion who are eligible for free school meals (which is seen as a proxy for social deprivation). But despite these challenges Somali pupils continue to narrow the gap to their peers.

The total Somali population present in Lambeth schools has declined in recent years, down from a high point of 1,716 pupils in 2017 to 1,318 in 2023. However, despite this decline the achievement of Somali pupils will continue to assume importance if they remain a sizeable cohort. The good news is the issues surrounding them have been recognised and are being addressed within the borough's schools.

Overall, the achievement of Somali pupils is not a particular cause of concern within Lambeth these days. However, there is a need for strategies to be developed to raise the achievement of this group at the national level.

REFERENCES

Gillborn, D. and Gipps, C (1996). *Recent Research on the Achievement of Ethnic Minority Pupils, OFSTED Reviews of Research*, HMSO, London.

Diriye, A (2006) *'The Ticking Bomb: The Educational Underachievement of Somali Children in British Schools'*.

Harris, H (2004) *'The Somali Community in the UK: What we know and how we know it'*, The Information Centre about Asylum and Refugees in the UK (ICAR), International Policy Institute, Kings College, London.

Ali, E and Jones, C (2000) *'Meeting the educational needs of Somali pupils in Camden schools'*, Institute of Education, London University.

DfES Good Practice Document (2003), *'Tackling Underachievement'*

Demie, F.; Taplin, A.; Butler, R.; Tong, R.; McDonald J. and Fisher, E. (2009). Raising Achievement in Lambeth Schools: Success and challenges in narrowing the achievement gap, Research and Statistics Unit, London Borough of Lambeth.

Demie, F. (2009). Ethnicity and Educational Achievement: Implication for school Improvement strategies, Research and Statistics Unit, London Borough of Lambeth.

Demie, F.; Taplin, A.; Butler, R.; Tong, R.; McDonald J. and Hutter, C. (2008). Raising Achievement of Portuguese Pupils in Lambeth Schools, Research and Statistics Unit, London Borough of Lambeth.

Demie, F.; McLean C, Lewis, K. (2007). Raising Achievement in Somali Pupils: School responses and challenges, Research and Statistics Unit, London Borough of Lambeth, March.

Demie, F.; McLean C, Lewis, K. (2008). Raising Achievement in Somali Pupils: Good Practice in London Schools, Research and Statistics Unit, London Borough of Lambeth, March.

Demie, F.; Strand, S. (2006). English language acquisition and educational attainment at the end of secondary school, Educational Studies, Volume 32, Number 2, June 2006, pp. 215-231.

Demie, F.; McLean C, Lewis, K. (2006). Raising Achievement of African Heritage pupils: Good Practice in Lambeth schools, Research and Statistics Unit, London Borough of Lambeth, March.