

Debate Pack

9 July 2025

Number CDP-0154 (2025)

By Nerys Roberts,
Robert Long,
Paul Bolton,
Hannah Burnett

Educational attainment of boys

1	Background	2
2	Parliamentary material	5
3	Press and stakeholder materials	9
4	Further reading	10

1

Background

There will be a backbench debate on the educational attainment of boys on Thursday 10 July 2025. This debate will take place in the Commons chamber and will be led by Sam Rushworth MP.

1.1

School outcomes

Boys perform worse than girls on most major educational indicators through their school years. In England, and in the 2023-24 academic year, boys performed worse on the following measures:

- [Exclusion](#): in the spring 2024 term, boys were more than 1.5 times more likely to be suspended than girls, and 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 three-quarters of girls.²
- [End of primary schooling](#): 64% of girls met the expected standard in all of English reading, writing and maths, compared to 57% of boys. However, boys did slightly better than girls, in maths alone: 74% met the expected standard, compared to 73% of girls.³
- [End of compulsory secondary education](#): girls do better across all headline Department for Education (DfE) measures than boys. For example, in 2024, 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 33% of White British boys, 33% of mixed White and Black Caribbean boys, and 35% of Caribbean boys attained grade 4 in both English and maths GCSEs in 2024. FSM-eligible boys from Gypsy/ Roma or Traveller or Irish Heritage backgrounds had particularly low pass rates but small

¹ Department for Education, [Spring term 2023/24, Suspensions and permanent exclusions in England](#), 24 April 2025, main text

² Department for Education, [Early years foundation stage profile results: 2023 to 2024](#), 28 November 2024, main text

³ Department for Education, [Academic year 2023/24, Key stage 2 attainment](#), 22 February 2025, main text

⁴ Department for Education, [Academic year 2023/24, Key stage 4 performance](#), 27 February 2025, [custom table](#)

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 2025, 23% of boys had identified SEN, compared to 13% of girls. 7% of boys had Education, health and care (EHC) plans, suggesting more complex special educational needs, compared to 3% 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 (HE) by age 19, than women, and this has been the case for many years. [In 2022/23](#), 54% of women had started in HE by 19, compared to only 40% of men.⁷ Men are also more likely to drop out of their HE courses. 15% of male full-time undergraduate entrants in 2021/22 did not continue to their second year compared to 11% of female entrants.⁸

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.⁹

[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.¹⁰

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 2021/22](#)

⁵ Department for Education, [Academic year 2023/24, Key stage 4 performance](#), 27 February 2025, [custom table](#)

⁶ Department for Education, [Special educational needs in England](#), 12 June 2025, [custom table](#)

⁷ Department for Education, [Widening participation in higher education, academic year 2022/23](#), 24 October 2024, main text

⁸ Office for Students, [Access and participation data dashboard](#), 25 July 2024

⁹ Department for Education, [Widening participation in higher education, academic year 2022/23](#), 24 October 2024, [custom table](#)

¹⁰ See for example [UCAS undergraduate end of cycle data resources, 2023](#)

[graduates](#) where the progression rate for men was 1.6 percentage points higher than for women.¹¹

Men who complete higher education also go on to have higher wages on average, than women. The [latest data is for earnings in the 2022/23 tax year](#), and covers UK-domiciled students who attended an English higher education institutions:

- Five years after graduation, the median earnings of females graduates with a first degree (only) were 13% lower than their male peers
- For females with a taught masters-level qualification, meaning earnings five years post-qualification were 17% lower than for male peers.¹²

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.

¹¹ Office for Students, [Student characteristics data: Outcomes data dashboard](#), 3 September 2024

¹² Department for Education, [LEO Graduate and Postgraduate Outcomes, Tax year 2022-23.](#), 26 June 2025, main text

2

Parliamentary material

2.1

Parliamentary questions

Education: Boys

11 April 2025 | UIN 44086

Asked by: James McMurdock

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what recent assessment she has made of the effectiveness of the education system for supporting the academic attainment of boys.

Answering member: Catherine McKinnell | Department for Education

All young people should have every opportunity to succeed, no matter who they are or where they are from. That is why, through our work to deliver the Opportunity Mission, the department will improve opportunities and life chances across the country for all children and young people.

As in previous years the latest attainment data shows girls continue to do better than boys across all headline measures, however, the gap has narrowed when comparing the 2023/24 academic year to the 2018/19 academic year. The department publishes attainment data by sex on an annual basis in the autumn term, which can be broken down by specific local authorities, including Essex. Further data can be accessed here: <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/key-stage-4-performance/2023-24>.

High and rising standards across schools are the heart of our mission and the key to unlocking stronger outcomes for every child and young person, regardless of their gender. The department aims to deliver these improvements through excellent teaching and leadership, a high quality curriculum and a system which removes the barriers to learning that hold too many children back.

The quality of teaching is the single most important in-school factor in improving outcomes for all children, which is why the department is committed to recruiting 6,500 new expert teachers. We have also launched an independent Curriculum and Assessment Review, which is closely examining the key challenges to attainment for young people and the barriers that hold children back from the opportunities and life chances they deserve.

To strengthen school improvement, the new regional improvement for standards and excellence (RISE) teams will provide both mandatory targeted intervention for schools identified by Ofsted as needing to improve and a

universal service, acting as a catalyst for a self-improving system, for all schools.

The department also engages regularly with teachers and headteachers and their representative bodies on a range of issues, including attainment, behaviour and attendance. This includes engagement through the department's teacher and headteacher reference groups.

Alongside this, the department regularly engages with school leaders and teachers to develop its attendance policy. During the spring term the department delivered a programme of nine regional attendance conferences across England, giving secondary school leaders and teachers the chance to hear how other schools are tackling attendance challenges and spread best practice across the system. The conference in the East of England was held on 17 March.

Schools: Standards

22 January 2025 | UIN 23830

Asked by: Neil O'Brien

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what the average progress 8 score (a) overall, (b) for girls and (c) for boys was in each year for which data is available by ethnic group.

Answering member: Catherine McKinnell | Department for Education

The average Progress 8 and Attainment 8 overall and for boys and girls by ethnic group are published at the following links:

- 2018/19 to 2023/24: <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/data-tables/permalink/cb96bc10-b240-4f42-5969-08dd3479441b>.
- 2017/18: <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/key-stage-4-and-multi-academy-trust-performance-2018-revised> (See the "Characteristics national tables", sheet "Characteristics Summary").
- 2016/17: <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/revised-gcse-and-equivalent-results-in-england-2016-to-2017> (See the "Characteristics national tables", sheet "Characteristics Summary").

The average Progress 8, Attainment 8, and percentage of pupils achieving grade 5 or above in English and mathematics GCSEs by ethnic group and region are published at the following links:

- 2018/19 to 2023/24: <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/data-tables/permalink/9a0ba337-3764-486e-596e-08dd3479441b>.

- 2017/18: <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/key-stage-4-and-multi-academy-trust-performance-2018-revised> (See the “Characteristics local authority tables”, sheet “Table LA8”).
- 2016/17: <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/revised-gcse-and-equivalent-results-in-england-2016-to-2017> (See the “Characteristics local authority tables”, sheet SFR01/2018, sheet “Table LA8”).

Universities: Boys

13 January 2025 | UIN 21651

Asked by: Mims Davies

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what steps she is taking with Cabinet colleagues to increase the number of white working-class boys attending university.

Answering member: Janet Daby | Department for Education

This government will act to address the persistent gaps for different groups and break down the barriers to opportunity. Opportunity should be available to all but too many people across our country do not get the chance to succeed.

Whilst many higher education (HE) providers have demonstrated positive examples of supporting all working-class students, including targeted outreach, on course bursaries and mentoring, we are keen to see the sector to go further. By summer, we will set out our plan for HE reform and we expect providers to play an even stronger role in improving access and outcomes for all disadvantaged students.

2.2

Debates

Educational Outcomes for Boys

Oral Answers to Questions | Women and Equalities

18 June 2025 | House of Commons Chamber | 769 c358

International Men’s Day

21 November 2024 | House of Commons Chamber | 757 cc448-471

Educational Attainment of Boys

5 March 2024 | Westminster Hall | 746 cc244WH-265WH

2.3

Select committees

Boys' attainment and engagement in education

Education Committee Inquiry | April – May 2024

3

Press and stakeholder materials

The following is a selection of news and media articles relevant to this debate.

Please note: the Library is not responsible for either the views or the accuracy of external content.

[Ulster University hosts launch of NI Boys' Impact Hub amid urgent calls to close gender education gap](#)

Ulster University
23 May 2025

[Boys will be boys: The educational underachievement of boys and young men](#)

Higher Education Policy Institute
20 March 2025

[Schools told to be more 'boy-positive' to fix male underachievement](#)

The Independent
20 March 2025

[Boys in England significantly outperforming girls in maths and science](#)

University College London
10 March 2025

[Government 'needs strategy' for boys' education](#)

UNESCO
17 September 2024

[Annual Report 2024: Gender](#)

Education Policy Institute
16 July 2024

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

Nick Fletcher MP
Schools Week
27 November 2023

[Sex gaps in education in England](#) (PDF)

Cambridge University Press & Assessment
1 November 2023

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

Men and Boys Coalition

4

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

25 July 2024

Disclaimer

The Commons Library does not intend the information in our research publications and briefings to address the specific circumstances of any particular individual. We have published it to support the work of MPs. You should not rely upon it as legal or professional advice, or as a substitute for it. We do not accept any liability whatsoever for any errors, omissions or misstatements contained herein. You should consult a suitably qualified professional if you require specific advice or information. Read our briefing '[Legal help: where to go and how to pay](#)' for further information about sources of legal advice and help. This information is provided subject to the conditions of the Open Parliament Licence.

Sources and subscriptions for MPs and staff

We try to use sources in our research that everyone can access, but sometimes only information that exists behind a paywall or via a subscription is available. We provide access to many online subscriptions to MPs and parliamentary staff, please contact [hoclibraryonline@parliament.uk](mailto:hoclbraryonline@parliament.uk) or visit commonslibrary.parliament.uk/resources for more information.

Feedback

Every effort is made to ensure that the information contained in these publicly available briefings is correct at the time of publication. Readers should be aware however that briefings are not necessarily updated to reflect subsequent changes.

If you have any comments on our briefings please email papers@parliament.uk. Please note that authors are not always able to engage in discussions with members of the public who express opinions about the content of our research, although we will carefully consider and correct any factual errors.

You can read our feedback and complaints policy and our editorial policy at commonslibrary.parliament.uk. If you have general questions about the work of the House of Commons email hcenquiries@parliament.uk.

The House of Commons Library is a research and information service based in the UK Parliament. Our impartial analysis, statistical research and resources help MPs and their staff scrutinise legislation, develop policy, and support constituents.

Our published material is available to everyone on commonslibrary.parliament.uk.

Get our latest research delivered straight to your inbox. Subscribe at commonslibrary.parliament.uk/subscribe or scan the code below:



 commonslibrary.parliament.uk

 [@commonslibrary](https://twitter.com/commonslibrary)