



## Sats

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# Covid drives biggest Sats results gap since 2012 for poorest pupils in England

**Deprived children fall further behind better-off peers as they lose most learning due to coronavirus**

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Children from deprived backgrounds in [England](#) lost the most learning due to Covid, according to tests that revealed the widest gap between them and non-disadvantaged primary school pupils for a decade.

The results of standardised literacy and maths tests [taken by year 6 pupils](#) this year showed a national decline, but detailed figures published by the Department for Education found disadvantaged children had a steeper fall than their better-off peers.

The DfE said the attainment gap between the two groups was the largest since 2012, “suggesting that disruption to learning during the Covid-19 pandemic has had a greater impact on disadvantaged pupils”.

Nationally, 59% of pupils aged 10 and 11 reached the expected standard in combined tests of maths, reading and writing, down from 65% in 2019, the previous time the tests - known as [Sats](#) - were taken.

Just 43% of disadvantaged children - those on free school meals or in care - met the attainment target in all three subjects this year, compared with 65% of non-disadvantaged pupils. Disadvantaged pupils make up one-third of those taking Sats.

Natalie Perera, the chief executive of the Education Policy Institute thinktank, said the results “paint a worrying picture for social mobility in England” and needed to be urgently addressed by the government.

“This is not just a result of the pandemic. The disadvantage gap for primary school pupils was already widening in 2019 and we can see that the pandemic has made it worse,” she said.

“Addressing the increasing inequality in our education system should be an urgent priority for the new prime minister. Given the challenges that loom ahead, ministers must focus on adequately resourcing schools and implementing a cross-government child poverty strategy.”

The DfE figures also showed stark variations between regions. In four local authorities - Bedford, Norfolk, Isle of Wight and Portsmouth - fewer than half of year 6 pupils reached expected standards in maths, reading and writing.

Only one local authority, Hackney, bucked the national trend and showed an improvement, with 68% of pupils passing each of the three tests, compared with 66% in 2019. But in neighbouring Tower Hamlets, the combined pass rate fell from 72% to 64%.

Other areas recorded steep declines, with Blackpool’s combined pass rate dropping from 67% in 2019 to 51%. [Schools](#) in Oldham recorded a fall of 13 percentage points.

Pupils whose first language is English suffered a disproportionate decline in results, according to the DfE’s analysis, which showed 58% of these children met the expected standard in all three subjects, down from 65%. In contrast, 60% of pupils whose first language is not English met the expected standard, down from 64% in 2019.

Some local authorities were unable to publish their results, after the DfE admitted that more than 2,000 test papers had been lost, affecting the results for more than 500 schools. Tests this year were the first to be administered by the outsourcing company [Capita](#), under contract to the DfE.

Paul Whiteman, the general secretary of the National Association of Head Teachers, said there had been “significant problems” with this year’s tests.

“Although this may be a small percentage of the number of papers overall, it still leaves hundreds of pupils without marks - pupils who are now entering secondary school without the end of primary results the government deems so important,” he said.

A spokesperson for Capita **told Schools Week**: “We recognise that it is unacceptable for there to be delays in a result being received, or for any paper to be lost in the process of being scanned and marked. We have apologised directly to the affected schools and their pupils.”

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