**Educational attainment: summary of official data on children and young people with a vision impairment in England**

July 2022 – Final

**Contents**

[1. Executive summary 1](#_Toc102643059)

[2. Population overview 3](#_Toc102643060)

[3. Foundation Stage (2019) 6](#_Toc102643061)

[4. Key Stage 1 (2019) 8](#_Toc102643062)

[5. Key Stage 2 (2019) 10](#_Toc102643063)

[6. Key Stage 4 (2020/21) 13](#_Toc102643064)

[7. Summary and potential next steps 15](#_Toc102643065)

[References 16](#_Toc102643066)

**1. Executive summary**

**Introduction**

This summary uses the latest attainment data published by the Department for Education (DfE) in England.

Most of the official data that is published by DfE (including attainment) only relates to a pupil’s primary special educational need (SEN). Therefore a significant group of vision impaired children are not included in this briefing.

There is also no way to split the VI population by VI only pupils and VI plus additional SEN. We know from other research that experiences of health, education and social care are different for children with vision impairment as their sole disability, compared to those with vision impairment and additional SEN.

We are able to access data covering Foundation Stage, and Key Stages 1, 2 and 4. Since 2014 there haven’t been any updates to the statistics collection around Key Stage 3. No data is available on the attainment for 16- to 18-year-olds (e.g. AS and A Levels) as the published data is not split by type of primary SEN.

**Around half of VI children have an additional SEN**

In the 2020/21 academic year there were a total of 18,457 pupils recorded as having a vision impairment as a primary or secondary SEN.

* 13,328 (72%) pupils had VI as their primary SEN and 5,129 (28%) had VI as their secondary SEN.
* 9,822 (53%) pupils were recorded as having VI only and 8,635 (47%) had VI plus an additional SEN.

**Population of children recorded as VI is growing**

The number of children recorded as having a VI SEN has been increasing over recent years. Over the period from 2016 to 2021 there are now over 1,600 more VI children with an identified SEN, equivalent to a 10% increase in the number of children being supported.

**Gap in attainment**

Children with a primary SEN of vision impairment have lower attainment compared to children without a SEN. This attainment gap is present at Foundation Stage, and continues through education:

* 32% gap at Foundation Stage.
* 33% gap at Key Stage 1.
* 28% gap at Key Stage 2.
* 21% gap at Key Stage 4.

**Little or no change**

Due to changes in the way attainment has been measured, and the suspension of some assessments due to Covid-19, there is limited trend information available for some Key Stages. However, based on the data we do have, there has been little or no change in the attainment gap over recent years.

**High performing SEN group**

Children with a primary SEN of vision impairment are one of the highest performing SEN groups.

**The available data is limited**

There are essentially three sub-groups of VI children we are interested in:

* Children with VI as their primary SEN and no secondary SEN
* Children with VI as their primary SEN plus a secondary SEN
* Children with another type of SEN as their primary one, and with VI as a secondary SEN.

The published data from DfE does not provide us with the whole picture as it does not include children with VI as a secondary SEN. The published data also does not include specific insights on any of the three sub-groups.

As part of writing this briefing, we submitted a Freedom of Information request to DfE to obtain more data. Unfortunately, as secondary SEN data is not included when the attainment datasets are produced, DfE’s response to the FOI was that it would take too much time for them to provide it.

**2. Population overview**

**Total population**

According to DfE published statistics in “Special educational needs in England: Academic Year 2020/21” there were a total of 18,457 pupils recorded as having VI as their primary or secondary SEN.

Of this total:

* 13,328 (72%) pupils had VI as their primary SEN and 5,129 (28%) had VI as their secondary SEN.
* 9,822 (53%) pupils were recorded as having VI only and 8,635 (47%) had VI plus an additional SEN.

The number of children recorded as having a VI SEN has been increasing over recent years. Over the period from 2016 to 2021 there are now over 1,600 more VI children with an identified SEN, equivalent to a 10% increase.

The chart below shows the total number of children with a primary or secondary SEN of vision impairment from 2016 to 2021. There is a clear trend of the number of children being supported increasing year on year.

**Chart: Number of children with VI as a primary or secondary SEN**

**Demographics**

Demographic information is only published on the basis of primary SEN, and therefore pupils with VI as a secondary SEN are not included.

These figures are only a breakdown of the children who have been identified by their school or local authority as having a vision impairment. It is not a true reflection of the wider prevalence of eye conditions or vision impairment in children.

**Age**

The below chart shows a distribution of pupils with a primary SEN of vision impairment by age. Only a very small number of children aged 2 and 3 have a recognised SEN, and this increases steadily to the age of 8 years. This increase will be the impact of children starting formal education, new sight conditions being identified or diagnosed through vision screening, etc. From the age of 8 to 15 years the number of pupils is relatively steady, with around 1,100 to 1,200 pupils in each year.

There is then a sharp decline once children once children reach 16 years, with the numbers reducing by around two-thirds. This decrease also occurs for all SEN pupils and non-SEN pupils, so appears to be related to how the data is collected.

**Chart: Distribution of pupils with a primary SEN of vision impairment by age**

**Gender**

* 7,375 (55%) were boys.
* 5,953 (45%) were girls.

**Ethnicity**

* 9,167 (69%) were White British.
* 1,113 (8%) were Pakistani.
* 605 (5%) were White Other.
* 2,268 (17%) were other ethnicities.
* 175 were unclassified in terms of ethnicity.

**Language**

* 11,025 (83%) used English language.
* 2,262 (17%) used other languages.
* 41 were unclassified in terms of language.

**Free School Meal eligibility**

* 9,458 (71%) were not eligible for free school meals.
* 3,870 (29%) were eligible for free school meals.

Note: Around 21% of all pupils in England are eligible for Free School Meals. This is in line with previous research that indicated that VI pupils were more likely to come from low-income households and be eligible for Free School Meals.

**School year**

* 760 (6%) were in early years or reception.
* 5,952 (45%) were in national curriculum years 1 to 6.
* 5,808 (44%) were in national curriculum years 7 to 11.
* 808 (6%) were in national curriculum years 12 to 14.

**3. Foundation Stage (2019)**

Foundation Stage attainment covers children aged 4 to 5 years, and assesses their starting point terms of language, literacy and maths and teacher assessments.

Assessments were not mandatory in 2020 and 2021 due to Covid-19 restrictions, and schools were not required to report results to Local Authorities or DfE. As a result no data has been published relating to these years.

**Population**

At the end of Foundation Stage in 2019, there were 604 pupils with VI as their primary SEN recorded. This represents around 0.09% of all Foundation Stage pupils, and 1% of pupils with an identified SEN attending state schools at the end of the academic year.

**Attainment**

Attainment at Foundation Stage is measured by assessing whether or not a pupil has achieved at least the expected standard in Early Learning Goals (ELGs). Pupils with VI as their primary SEN had attainment rates of:

* 43% achieving at least the expected standard in all ELGs.
* 45% achieving at least the expected standard in prime areas of learning (e.g. numeracy and literacy). In the data this is called having a “good level of development”.

There is a significant attainment gap at Foundation Stage between VI pupils and pupils with no SEN:

* At least the expected standard in all ELGs = 33% gap (43% of VI pupils compared to 76% of pupils with no SEN).
* Good level of development = 32% gap (45% of VI pupils compared to 77% of pupils with no SEN).

However, VI pupils were the highest performing SEN group at Foundation Stage:

* 24% of All SEN pupils achieved at least the expected standard in all ELGs, compared to 43% of pupils with VI as a primary SEN.
* 25% of All SEN pupils achieved a “good level of development”, compared to 45% of pupils with VI as a primary SEN.

**Trends**

The following chart contains information on the gap in attainment between VI pupils and pupils with no SEN over the academic years 2014 to 2019. The metric used is the percentage of pupils having a good level of development.

The chart shows fluctuations in the data mostly in the range of around 35% to 30%. An increase in the attainment gap in the 2018 academic year means that there is no clear trend over this time period.

**Chart: Gap in attainment between VI primary SEN pupils and no SEN pupils having a good level of development at Foundation Stage, 2014 to 2019**

**4. Key Stage 1 (2019)**

Key Stage 1 involves national tests in English reading and maths; and also teacher assessments in maths, science, and English reading and writing. It relates to children in Year 2, aged 6 or 7 years old.

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Department for Education cancelled national curriculum assessments and associated data collections. Therefore, the most recent Key Stage 1 data relates to assessments conducted in 2019.

**Population**

At the end of Key Stage 1 in 2019, there were 919 pupils with VI as their primary SEN recorded. This represents around 0.14% of all Key Stage 1 pupils, and 1.4% of pupils with an identified SEN attending state schools at the end of the academic year.

**Attainment**

Attainment at Key Stage 1 is measured by assessing whether or not a pupil has achieved at least the expected standard in writing, reading, maths and science. There is also an additional metric for English and Maths that gives the proportion of pupils working at a greater depth. Pupils with VI as their primary SEN had attainment rates of:

* 51% achieving at least the expected standard in English Reading, with 12% working at greater depth.
* 43% achieving at least the expected standard in English Writing, with 6% working at a greater depth.
* 53% achieving at least the expected standard in Maths, with 10% working at a greater depth.
* 62% achieving at least the expected standard in Science.

There is a significant attainment gap at Key Stage 1 between VI pupils and pupils with no SEN:

* At least the expected standard in English Writing = 32% gap (51% of VI pupils compared to 83% of pupils with no SEN).
* At least the expected standard in English Reading = 35% gap (43% of VI pupils compared to 78% of pupils with no SEN).
* At least the expected standard in Maths = 31% gap (53% of VI pupils compared to 84% of pupils with no SEN).
* At least the expected standard in Science = 28% gap (62% of VI pupils compared to 90% of pupils with no SEN).

However, VI pupils were the highest performing SEN group at Key Stage 1. Aggregating attainment for Maths and English, the attainment for the All SEN group was 28%, compared to 49% for pupils with a primary SEN of vision impairment.

**Trends**

The following chart contains information on the gap in attainment between Vi pupils and pupils with no SEN over the academic years 2016 to 2019. The metric used is an aggregate of the English and Maths attainment rates at Key Stage 1.

The chart shows little fluctuation in the data over this time period, with all four years’ data all being in the range of 33% to 31%.

**Chart: Gap in attainment between VI primary SEN pupils and no SEN pupils at Key Stage 1 (maths and English attainment combined), 2016 to 2019**

**5. Key Stage 2 (2019)**

Key Stage 2 involves national tests in English reading, maths, and grammar, punctuation and spelling, and teacher assessments in English writing and science. It relates to children in Year 6, aged 10 or 11 years old.

All Key Stage 2 publications were cancelled in 2020 and 2021 due to Covid-19.

**Population**

At the end of Key Stage 2 in 2019, there were 1,032 pupils with VI as their primary SEN recorded. This represents around 0.16% of all Key Stage 2 pupils, and 0.9% of pupils with an identified SEN attending state schools at the end of the academic year.

**Attainment**

Attainment at Key Stage 2 is measured by assessing whether or not a pupil has achieved at least the expected standard in writing, reading, maths and grammar, punctuation and spelling. There is also additional metrics that provide the average for reading and writing and maths combined; and the proportion of pupils working at a higher standard. Pupils with VI as their primary SEN had attainment rates of:

* 46% achieving at least the expected standard in reading, writing and maths; with 6% working at a higher standard.
* 58% achieving at least the expected standard in reading, with 22% working at a greater depth.
* 59% achieving at least the expected standard in writing, with 11% working at a greater depth.
* 63% achieving at least the expected standard in maths, with 15% working at a greater depth.
* 59% achieving at least the expected standard in grammar, punctuation and spelling, with 21% working at a greater depth.

There is a significant attainment gap at Key Stage 2 between VI pupils and pupils with no SEN:

* At least the expected standard in reading, writing and maths = 28% gap (46% of VI pupils compared to 74% of pupils with no SEN).
* At least the expected standard in reading = 23% gap (58% of VI pupils compared to 81% of pupils with no SEN).
* At least the expected standard in writing = 29% gap (59% of VI pupils compared to 88% of pupils with no SEN).
* At least the expected standard in maths = 24% gap (63% of VI pupils compared to 87% of pupils with no SEN).
* At least the expected standard in grammar, punctuation and spelling = 28% gap (59% of VI pupils compared to 87% of pupils with no SEN).

However, pupils with VI as a primary SEN were the highest performing SEN group at Key Stage 2. For All SEN pupils the average attainment in reading writing and maths was 22%, compared to 46% for pupils with VI as a primary SEN.

**Trends**

The following chart contains information on the gap in attainment between Vi pupils and pupils with no SEN over the academic years 2016 to 2019. The metric used is the proportion of pupils having the expected standard of reading, writing and maths at Key Stage 2.

The chart shows fluctuation in the data over this time period, in the range of 28% to 34%. There is not clear trend in the attainment gap at Key Stage 2.

**Chart: Gap in attainment between VI primary SEN pupils and no SEN pupils having the expected standard of reading, writing and maths at Key Stage 2, 2016 to 2019**

**6. Key Stage 4 (2020/21)**

Key Stage 4 is GCSEs, which are taken by most children in Year 11, aged 15 or 16 years.

The method for awarding GCSE results was different in 2020 and in 2021 due to Covid-19 restrictions. However, data has still been published for these years, with caveats about drawing any insights around longer-term trend based on data from these years.

**Population**

At the end of Key Stage 4 in 2021, there were 1,109 pupils with VI as their primary SEN recorded. This represents around 0.19% of all Key Stage 4 pupils, and 1.3% of pupils with an identified SEN attending state schools at the end of the academic year.

**Maths and English**

One of the metrics of attainment at Key Stage 4 is grades in English (language or literature) and Maths. Pupils with VI as their primary SEN had attainment rates:

* 58.1% achieving grade 4 and above.
* 39.4% achieving grade 5 or above.

Pupils with VI as their primary SEN were one of the highest performing SEN groups. However, there is a significant gap in English and Maths attainment to pupils with no SEN:

* Grade 4 and above = 21% gap (58% of VI pupils compared to 79% of pupils with no SEN).
* Grade 5 and above = 19% gap (39% of VI pupils compared to 58% of pupils with no SEN).

**Core subjects**

A second metric at Key Stage 4 highlights attainment across the five key subjects: English, maths, science, a language; and history or geography. This school performance measure is called the English Baccalaureate (EBacc). It’s also useful to consider because it includes a wider range of subjects that need to be made accessible to pupils with different educational needs.

Pupils with VI as their primary SEN had attainment rates:

* 21% achieving grade 4 and above across EBacc subjects.
* 16% achieving grade 5 or above across EBacc subjects.

As with Maths and English, pupils with VI as their primary SEN were one of the highest performing SEN groups but significant gap to pupils with no SEN.

* EBacc grade 4 and above = 13% gap (21% of VI pupils compared to 34% of pupils with no SEN).
* EBacc grade 5 and above = 9% gap (16% of VI pupils compared to 25% of pupils with no SEN).

**Trends**

Academic years in 2020 and 2021 have been disrupted due to the covid pandemic, and different methods to award Key Stage 4 grades have been used in both years. It is possible to look at trends in the attainment gap between pupils with a vision impairment as their primary SEN and pupils with no SEN.

The following chart contains information on the gap in attainment between Vi pupils and pupils with no SEN over the last 10 academic years. The metric used is English and Maths grade 4 (or grade C) and above.

The chart shows fluctuations in the data mostly in the range of around 19% to 22%. The exceptions to this are the years 2012 and 2013 where the gap in attainment was slightly higher (in 2013 it was 26%). Since 2015 the attainment gap looks to be relatively stable with no identifiable trend.

**Chart: Gap in attainment in KS4 English and Maths (grade 4 and above) between VI primary SEN pupils and no SEN pupils**

**7. Summary and next steps**

Children with vision impairment perform less well than their peers who do not have any special educational needs. This gap is evident at Foundation Stage and continues through to GCSEs.

There has been little or no change in this gap in attainment over recent years.

Published data on attainment is limited to pupils who have a primary SEN of vision impairment. It does not allow identification of key sub-groups whose needs, experiences and attainment can differ significantly.

Department of Education have made it clear that any request to include secondary SEN in attainment data will fall out the scope of a FOI. Secondary SEN is not included amongst the data collections that are matched and processed to create the data underpinning the national statistics on attainment. As DfE do not hold the data in this format it will exceed their cost threshold for dealing with FOI requests.

Until this situation changes any pupil characteristic or attainment data in the public domain will be limited to primary SEN, and not allow sub-group analysis for VI children. It would be possible to commission external researchers who have access to the underlying Schools Census data to create this data from scratch, but this would be costly especially if done each year.

John Slade

Research and Insight, RNIB

July 2022

**References**

Foundation Stage data

[Statistics: early years foundation stage profile - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)](https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/statistics-early-years-foundation-stage-profile)

Key Stage 1 data

[Statistics: key stage 1 - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)](https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/statistics-key-stage-1)

Key Stage 2 data

[Statistics: key stage 2 - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)](https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/statistics-key-stage-2)

Key Stage 4 data

[Statistics: GCSEs (key stage 4) - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)](https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/statistics-gcses-key-stage-4)