



## BRIEFING PAPER

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# Educational outcomes of Black pupils and students

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## 1. Summary and scope of briefing

This briefing looks at educational outcomes for Black school pupils and progress into higher education and into the workplace. It focuses on England.

At GCSE level, young people from the Black major ethnic group<sup>1</sup>, on average, have the lowest combined English and maths pass rate of any major ethnic group. However, Black pupils fare better on the main progress measure. Black African pupils generally fare better than Black Caribbean pupils, and Black pupils eligible for Free School Meals (FSM) also attain better on some key measures than White pupils eligible for FSM.

In England, young people from Black ethnic groups are more likely to go on to higher education than average, but less likely to obtain high grades, enter 'prestigious' universities, end up in a 'highly-skilled' job, study further or have career satisfaction.

There are marked differences in higher education entry rates between people from different Black ethnic groups, and between men and women, although available data isn't always further broken down by socio-economic status.

## 2. Schools

Schools in England are already subject to equality duties to tackle discrimination, harassment, to advance equality of opportunity, and foster good relations across people with different protected characteristics, including race.

At school level, there's no ring-fenced funding to address racial and ethnic disparities in educational outcomes. Separate grants, such as the Ethnic Minority Achievement Grant (EMAG) have been rolled up into mainstream grant funding. Generally, it's up to schools and local authorities how they spend their budgets and how they target their funding.

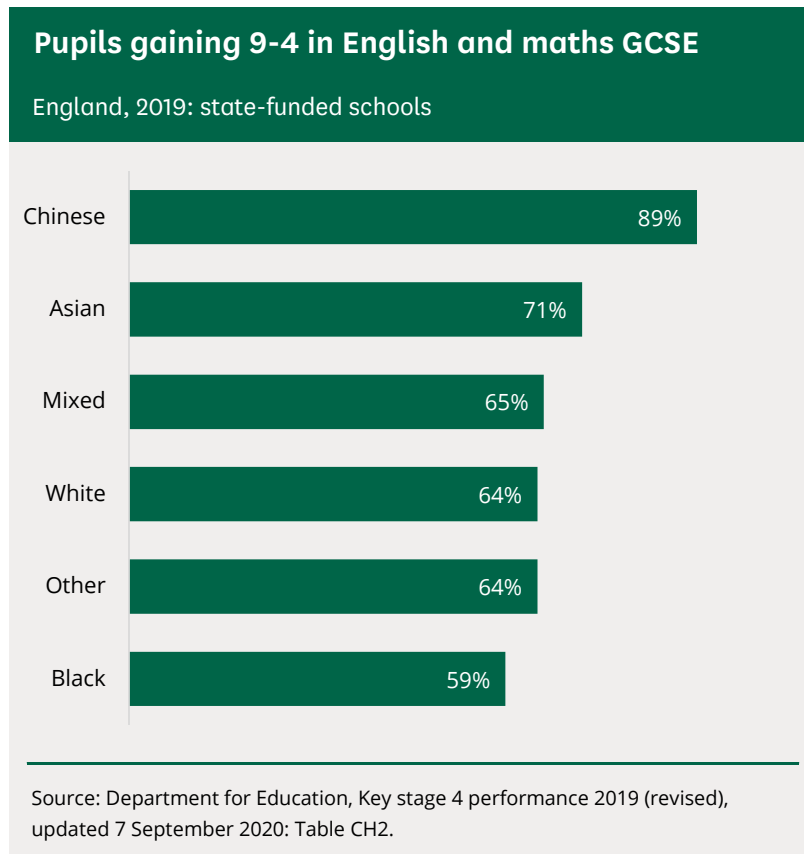
The Government's new [Commission on Race and Ethnic Disparities](#) promises to look at inequalities, and also to explore "success factors" that help reduce these, but how are Black school pupils in England faring now, and how does this compare to pupils from other ethnic groups?

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<sup>1</sup> In Department for Education (DfE) data, the Black major ethnic group categorisation includes: 'Black African', 'Black Caribbean', and 'any other black background'.

## 2.1 Black pupils have the lowest pass rate for GCSE English and maths combined

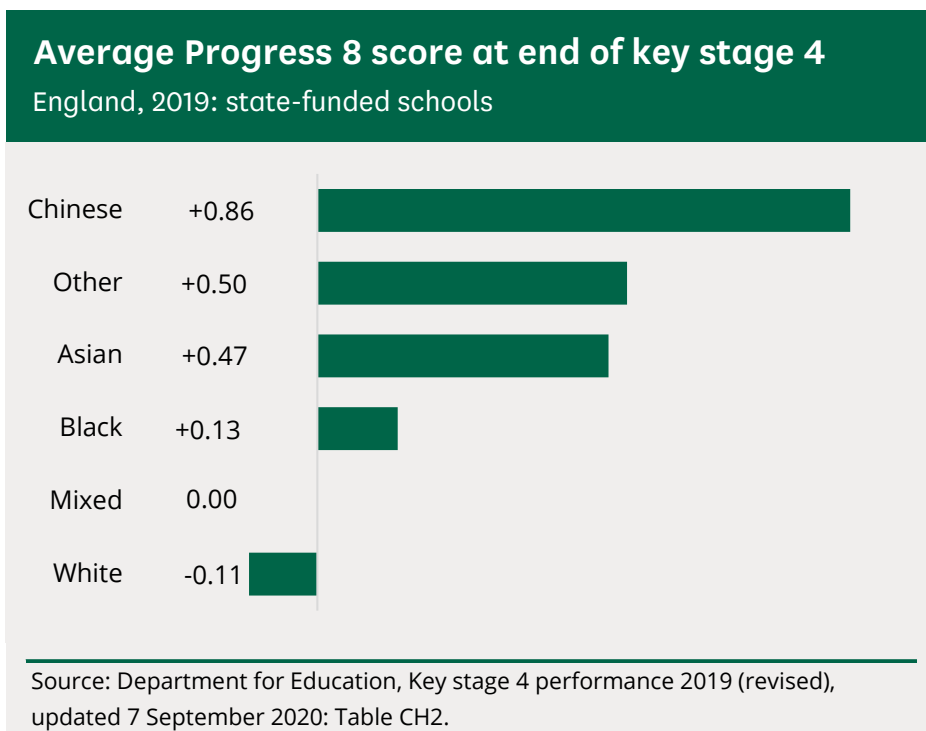
In 2018/19, across the Black major ethnic group, 59% of pupils attained a standard pass in English and maths GCSE (grades 9 to 4, broadly equivalent to the old A\* to C grading). This is the lowest rate for any major ethnic group.



Another way of looking at school performance is to consider the progress schools make with their pupils between the end of key stage 2 (end of primary) and the end of key stage 4 (GCSE phase). The main measure for this is known as *Progress 8*.

A positive score means that on average, a group of pupils makes more progress than peers with similar prior attainment nationally. White pupils make the least progress of any major ethnic group, at -0.11. Black pupils typically make more progress, at +0.13, but lag behind Chinese pupils (+0.86) and Asian pupils (+0.47).

The chart on the next page illustrates the average *Progress 8* scores for each major ethnic group.



## 2.2 Looking at detailed characteristics reveals a more nuanced picture

In 2018/19, 64% of Black African pupils attained standard passes in both English and maths GCSE, which is close to the national average. However, Black Caribbean pupils had significantly lower pass rates, at 48%. Black African pupils also made more progress, with an average *Progress 8* score of +0.33, whilst for Black Caribbean pupils the average score was -0.31.

There are also gender disparities, mirroring trends seen nationally, where girls tend to outperform boys on most GCSE attainment measures. 42% of Black Caribbean boys attained 9-4 GCSEs in both English and maths, whilst the figure for Black Caribbean girls was 55%. Black pupils eligible for free school meals (FSM), as a whole, outperform their White FSM-eligible peers on the English and maths threshold measure. However, Black pupils, on average, still have attainment rates considerably below the average for FSM-eligible peers from Asian and Chinese backgrounds.<sup>2</sup>

## 2.3 Beyond GCSE attainment?

A [research report for the Runnymede Trust](#), published in June 2020 argued that whilst focusing on attainment gaps was important because these had “profound material consequences”, we should also be looking at education as a wider enterprise, and the experiences of Black pupils in schools.<sup>3</sup> Based on research in secondary schools Greater Manchester, the authors argue that racism “still plagues our society and our schools”.<sup>4</sup> They recommend:

- Reforms to the National Curriculum and associated exam content.

<sup>2</sup> Department for Education, [Key stage 4 performance 2019 \(revised\)](#), updated 7 September 2020: Table CH2.

<sup>3</sup> Runnymede Trust, [Race and racism in secondary schools in England](#), June 2020, p4.

<sup>4</sup> As above, p3.

## 4 Educational outcomes of Black pupils and students

- Increasing the proportion of teachers from BME backgrounds and ensuring that racial literacy is placed 'at the heart of all teacher training routes'.
- Requiring all schools to have 'strong and clear' anti-racist policies.
- Ensuring that the police don't become a 'normalised presence' in schools.

### 3. Higher education

#### 3.1 Access to higher education has increased

The latest data on access to higher education is from the admissions service UCAS. In 2019 just under 51,000 people from Black ethnic groups in England were accepted to full-time undergraduate courses in the UK. 40,000 were Black African, 8,600 Black Caribbean and 2,400 from other Black backgrounds. A further 10,000 people from mixed Black and White backgrounds were accepted. The total was up on the previous two years but below the 2015 peak.

UCAS estimates entry *rates* which allow us to compare different groups, but only for broad ethnic groups. The table below gives estimated entry rates for 18-year-olds.

HE participation rates for 18 year olds				
Young people from England in 2019				
	All institutions		High tariff institutions	
Chinese	68%		35%	
Asian	50%		11%	
Black	45%		8%	
Other	43%		10%	
Mixed	36%		11%	
White	30%		9%	

Source: End of cycle data resources, UCAS

45% of Black 18-year-olds across England were accepted to higher education in 2019. While this was lower than rates among<sup>5</sup> 18-year-olds from Chinese and Asian ethnic groups, it was well above the levels for White and Mixed ethnic groups and the overall average (35%). The entry rate of Black young people has increased from 28% in 2010, the largest increase of any ethnic group.

<sup>5</sup> Combined rate for Indian, Pakistani, Bangladeshi and 'other Asian' ethnic groups.

## 'Prestigious' university access is the lowest of all ethnic groups

UCAS breaks down entry rates by the 'tariff' level of different universities, between high, medium and low, which refer to average grades of students admitted.

High tariff institutions are generally considered more prestigious and harder to get into. The earlier table gives entry rates to these institutions. While 45% of Black 18-year-olds entered higher education in 2019, only 8% went to a higher tariff institution. This was the lowest rate of any ethnic group.

Another way of looking at this disparity is the **proportion of entrants** to higher education who got into a higher tariff institution. This rate was 17% for Black 18-year-olds compared to 51% of their Chinese and 30% of their White contemporaries respectively.

## Differences between Black ethnic groups and gender entering higher education

A more detailed ethnic breakdown has been produced by the Department for Education. This looks at the proportion of young people from state-funded schools starting higher education by age 19.

This is given in the following table, which includes a gender breakdown

<b>Progression to HE for Black young people, England</b>				
Percentage of pupils from state-funded schools starting HE by age 19, 2018/19				
		Female	Male	All
Black	Black - African	74.6	59.1	66.9
	Black Caribbean	54.6	34.6	44.7
	Any Other Black Background	60.4	44.0	52.1
	<b>Total</b>	<b>67.5</b>	<b>50.7</b>	<b>59.1</b>
Mixed	White and Black African	59.8	42.6	51.5
	White and Black Caribbean	42.2	29.3	35.8
<b>All ethnic groups</b>		<b>48.0</b>	<b>37.3</b>	<b>42.5</b>

Source: Widening participation in higher education 2018/19, DfE

These rates are somewhat higher than UCAS's because they include older starters. 59% of Black young people started higher education by age 19.

Rates for mixed White and Black young people were lower, particularly White and Black Caribbean. Two thirds of Black African young people went to higher education. Although the rate in the Black Caribbean group was lower at 45%, it was still above average.

Progression rates were around 30%<sup>6</sup> higher among women across all ethnic groups. The gender gap among Black Caribbean young people was, at 58%, larger than any other ethnic group. Men from this group had below-average progression rates. The next largest gaps were within the mixed White and Black groups.

<sup>6</sup> Relative difference in progression rates

Just 5.2% of Black Caribbean young people progressed to higher education at a 'high tariff' institution. This was less than half the rate across all students (10.9%) and the lowest level of any ethnic group other than Gypsy/Roma and Traveller groups.

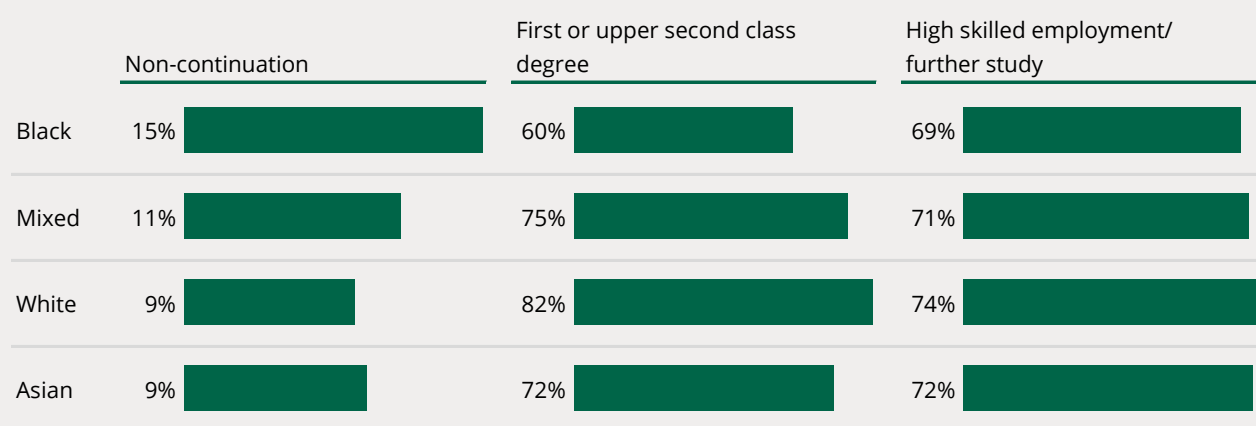
### Black students are less likely to stay in higher education

While entry rates to higher education are higher among Black young people, retention rates are generally lower, and degree outcomes poorer, than average.

The latest data is for 2016/17 starters and graduates, summarised in the chart below.

#### More Black students drop out, fewer gain top grades or have better outcomes after graduation

Undergraduates from England, 2016-17



Sources: Continuation rates and transfers, Office for Students  
Differences in student outcomes, Office for Students

The Office for Students, an independent regulator of higher education, measures the proportion of new full-time domestic students at English universities who were continuing their studies one year later.

The non-continuation rate (no longer in higher education) for 2016/17 starters was highest for Black students at 15.0%. For students from Mixed ethnic groups, 11.2% were no longer in higher education, for Asian students it was 9.7%, and for White students, 8.7%. This broad pattern has remained stable since 2010.<sup>7</sup> The data do not break down by detailed ethnic groups.

### Results gap

According to the Office for Students, Black graduates were least likely to gain a first or upper second class degree. 60% did so in 2016/17, which was more than ten percentage points less than for any other ethnic group.

Some of this difference can be 'explained' (statistically) by differences in entry qualifications. However, even after this and other factors are taken into account, there still remains a gap with Black graduates still receiving fewer top grades than White graduates. This 'unexplained' gap was 17 percentage points in 2016/17. Those from a Mixed background were six points behind White graduates.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>7</sup> [Continuation rates and transfers](#), Office for Students

<sup>8</sup> [Differences in student outcomes](#), Office for Students

## Careers after higher education

Black graduates were less likely to be in 'highly skilled employment' or further study six months after graduation, although the gaps on this measure were smaller.

69% of Black graduates in 2016/17 were in these activities compared with 71% of Mixed, 72% of Asian and 74% of White graduates.<sup>9</sup>

A survey of graduates 3.5 years after completing their studies found that Black graduates were less likely to be satisfied with their careers.<sup>10</sup> Among graduates aged 25 or under at the start of higher education, 80% of Black Caribbean and 82% of Black African respondents said they were very or fairly satisfied with their careers. This compares with 88% of White graduates.

The gap was even larger among those aged 26 or over when they began studying: 74% of Black Caribbean and 73% of Black African graduates were satisfied with their careers compared with 87% of White graduates. These gaps are smaller, but still statistically significant after other factors such as sex, prior qualifications and deprivation are controlled for.

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<sup>9</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>10</sup> [Higher education outcomes: How career satisfaction among graduates varies by ethnicity](#), HESA

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