

# Schoolchildren without English as a first language 'catch up'

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New research by the University of Oxford shows that children classified as EAL (English as an Additional Language) usually catch up with their peers in their school attainment by the time they are 16.

The reports' authors, Professor Steve Strand and Professor Victoria Murphy of the University's Department of Education, found that at the age of five only 44% of EAL [pupils](#) have achieved a good level of development compared to 54% of other pupils. However, by the age of 16, this gap has narrowed significantly with 58.3% achieving five A\*- C GCSEs including English and maths compared to 60.9% of other pupils.

In 2014, over one million children were defined as having EAL. During the same year, local authorities allocated £243 million to schools through their locally determined arrangements, to support EAL pupils. Under the current system, the EAL category encompasses any pupil that speaks a language in addition to English and has entered compulsory education within the last three years. The report highlights that the EAL classification currently gives no indication of a pupil's proficiency in the English language; so, crucially, the bilingual child of a French banker is grouped together with a Somali refugee who may not speak English at all.

The researchers drilled down into the attainment figures for different groups of EAL pupils. They found speakers of Portuguese, Somali, Lingala and Lithuanian have especially low outcomes at age 16, but Russian and Spanish speakers do particularly well.

The researchers found that pupils recorded as EAL are very unevenly distributed across the UK and concentrations of EAL students can be very specific to a small local area. A quarter of schools (22%) have less than 1% EAL pupils but in 8.4% of schools, EAL pupils make up over half of the [school](#) population. They conclude that schools should be held accountable for spending their resources in ways that reduce the attainment gap of pupils within the EAL category.

Report co-author Steve Strand, Professor of Education, said: 'This research shows how important EAL funding is for driving up attainment levels of those most at risk of underachievement. These findings show local authorities need to continue prioritising this form of funding and schools should carefully target the pupils who will benefit most.'

Professor Victoria Murphy, Professor of Applied Linguistics and co-author, said: 'This report provides an important analysis of achievement in children with EAL and highlights the need for more targeted research

aimed at identifying the most effective provision for [children](#) with EAL.'

Provided by Oxford University

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