

1. INTRODUCTION

This report by the DfE's Education and Standards Analysis and Research Division entitled *How do pupils progress during Key Stages 2 and 3?* presents statistical analyses of pupils' progress in **reading, writing and maths** during **years 3-9**, based on a sample of termly teacher assessments for over 70,000 pupils in 10 Local Authorities. It complements the regularly published statistical analyses of pupil progress at Key Stages by considering progress *within* Key Stages, **measured on a termly basis by teacher assessments** from a sample of schools in England¹.

The main issues addressed are:

- when most progress is made;
- who makes most progress;
- how termly progress adds up to expected threshold levels of achievement; and
- what progress through National Curriculum Key Stages 2 and 3 looks like empirically – the patterns and pathways actually followed by pupils.

2. MAIN FINDINGS

Learning Pathways (details in Chapter 5)

- For many pupils, progress during Key Stages 2 and 3 is not linear and continuous; episodes of regression to an earlier level of attainment, or remaining at the same level for a period, are part of the norm.
- Patterns of progress are highly individual; there is *low* concentration of pupils into one pathway or another, especially in reading and writing.
- The more progress a pupil made in the previous term, the less likely they are to make progress the following term, and vice versa.

Timing of Progress (Chapter 1)

- More progress is made per year in Key Stage 2 than Key Stage 3 in all three subjects, but especially in reading and writing.
- Pupils make most progress during the summer term and least progress during the autumn term.

Prior Attainment (Chapter 2)

- Pupils who were behind at the previous Key Stage are less likely to make progress than those who had achieved the expected level or above.
- Differences in progress by prior attainment were largest for maths.

Expected Levels of Attainment (Chapter 3)

- The percentages of pupils achieving the expected level, and above the expected level, increase steadily through KS2 and KS3, with average attainment rising from level 2 in year 3 to level 5 in year 9.
- By the end of year 5, significant proportions of pupils have already reached the expected level for the end of Key Stage 2: 62% in reading, 44% in writing, and 52% in maths. By the end of year 8, 66% have achieved the end of Key Stage 3 expected level in reading, as have 65% in writing, and 70% in maths.
- However, the rate of progress by high attainers in reading and writing is slower than expected during Key Stage 3: in reading, almost 30% of pupils begin the Key Stage at the expected level (L5), but only around 20% have reached the next level (L6) after two more years of schooling.

¹ By the end of the project in 2009-10, 343 schools were taking part, with a total of 37,000 pupils having a complete three year Teacher Assessment data set.

Pupil Characteristics (Chapter 4)

- Boys are less likely to make progress than girls in all three subjects; the differences are larger during Key Stage 3, when the probability of progressing each year decreases more for boys than for girls. Maths has the smallest gender progress differences, and reading has the largest.
- The gaps in attainment widen between pupils known to be eligible for Free School Meals (FSM) and their peers as there are greater differences in progress in years 4 and 5 during Key Stage 2, although pupils with FSM also make less progress during Key Stage 3. Reading has the smallest FSM progress differences, and maths has the largest.
- The widening of the attainment gaps between pupils with Special Educational Needs (SEN) and their peers is spread across both Key Stages, with similar differences in progress in years 4-5 as in years 8-9; interestingly, in year 7, when the gap is actually narrowing in reading and writing, it continues to grow in maths at a faster rate than any other year.
- Chinese pupils progress the most, especially in maths; unlike other ethnic groups who may be 'catching up' during KS2 and 3, Chinese pupils are already ahead of White pupils in attainment of the expected levels at Key Stage 1.
- Asian pupils also make more progress than White pupils, but this is concentrated in Key Stage 2, with their progress slowing to be more in line with other pupils in the latter part of Key Stage 3. Black pupils show a tendency for polarized progress performance in Key Stage 3, with more failing to progress, as well as more making three or more sub-levels of progress per year (compared with White pupils).
- Pupils with English as an Additional Language (EAL) make more sub-levels of progress than other pupils in all years in all three subjects. This represents 'catching up' with other pupils, who tend to have higher prior attainment levels at Key Stage 1. The biggest difference is in reading, with smaller differences in writing and maths.

3. KEY QUESTIONS ARISING

The Executive Summary of the report frames the following two key questions, suggesting that 'in either case, there may be implications for how schools would wish to organise their teaching and learning':

- ***If pupil progress is currently non-linear and/or non-continuous for a significant proportion of Key Stage 2 and 3 learners, to what extent is this due to inherent tendencies of pupils?***
- ***To what extent are these progress patterns influenced by the systems, focus and intervention that a school places at different points in the academic year or the Key Stages?***

**The full report can be viewed/downloaded at: <https://www.education.gov.uk/publications> >
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