



Briefing note: PISA 2025

Briefing on PISA 2025: national report for England

Introduction

1. The publication of [*PISA 2025: national report for England*](#), provides a very positive analysis of the performance of England's education system. Pupils in England performed significantly above the OECD average in science, reading and mathematics, providing evidence of the high standards being achieved across the school system.
2. Science performance has increased significantly since 2022, while reading and mathematics performance has remained broadly stable over the longer term. England also has a comparatively large proportion of pupils achieving at the highest proficiency levels.
3. The findings should be recognised as an achievement for the teachers, school leaders, support staff and trusts working to secure strong outcomes for pupils. They also provide an important reminder that high standards and equity must be pursued together: the overall strength of England's performance coexists with substantial gaps between pupils from different socioeconomic backgrounds and, in some subjects, widening gender gaps.
4. As with all international assessments, caution is required when interpreting cross-country comparisons and trends over time. While England met OECD participation standards and the participating schools were found to be highly representative of the national school population, the report also notes some evidence of non-response bias within the pupil sample. Pupils who did not participate were slightly more likely to have been eligible for free school meals and slightly more likely to receive special educational needs support. Nevertheless, the results provide useful evidence that England remains a high-performing education system by international standards, while also highlighting areas where further improvement is needed.

Findings

Strong international performance

5. England's average score was 516 in science, 497 in reading and 492 in mathematics, significantly above the OECD averages of 482, 461 and 463 respectively. In science, only seven participating education systems performed significantly above England; in reading, three did so; and in mathematics, nine.
6. England also performs strongly across the attainment distribution. In science, 14% of pupils reached the highest proficiency levels (Levels 5 or 6), compared with 7% across the OECD, while

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16% were below Level 2 compared with 26% across the OECD. In reading, 10% reached Levels 5 or 6 compared with 6% across the OECD, and 19% were below Level 2 compared with 31%. In mathematics, 14% reached Levels 5 or 6 compared with 8%, while 25% were below Level 2 compared with 35%.

7. England's performance is particularly notable given the wider international picture. Many high-performing education systems experienced significant declines between 2022 and 2025, particularly in reading and mathematics. By contrast, England maintained stable performance in reading and mathematics over the longer term, while science performance improved significantly from 503 in 2022 to 516 in 2025. At a time when OECD trend averages have fallen across all three domains since 2015, England has largely maintained, and in science improved, its performance.

Attainment gap

8. The findings also highlight the continuing challenge of socioeconomic disadvantage. The gap between pupils in the most and least disadvantaged socioeconomic groups was 81 points in science, 66 points in reading and 89 points in mathematics. The science and mathematics gaps were not significantly different from the OECD averages, while England's reading gap was significantly narrower.

9. Pupils eligible for free school meals performed significantly below pupils who were not eligible across all three domains. At the same time, England compares relatively well on some measures of the relationship between socioeconomic status and attainment: the association between socioeconomic status and performance was weaker than the OECD average in science and reading, and the proportion of performance variation explained by socioeconomic status was lower than the OECD average across all three domains

10. There is also evidence of academic resilience. 14% of disadvantaged pupils were classified as academically resilient in science, 16% in reading and 13% in mathematics, compared with OECD averages of 12%, 13% and 12% respectively. This is an important reminder that disadvantage does not determine outcomes, and that schools can and do make a difference.

Gender differences

11. The report also identifies differences in performance by gender. The gender difference in science was 13 points, favouring boys, with no significant gender gap in previous cycles. The difference in mathematics was 26 points, also favouring boys, with the gap having widened from 12 points in 2015. Reading shows the opposite pattern with a difference of 11 points, favouring girls, narrowing from 23 points in 2015.

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