



***one*Notice of a Meeting**

People Overview & Scrutiny Committee

Monday, 2 October 2023 at 11.30 am

Room 2&3 - County Hall, New Road, Oxford OX1 1ND

These proceedings are open to the public

If you wish to view proceedings, please click **on this [Live Stream Link](#)**.
However, that will not allow you to participate in the meeting.

Membership

Chair - Councillor Nigel Simpson
Deputy Chair - Councillor Sally Povolotsky

Councillors: Imade Edosomwan Jenny Hannaby Liam Walker
Trish Elphinstone Nick Leverton
Andy Graham Michael Waine

Co-optees: Ruth Bennie Fraser Long

Notes: *Date of next meeting: 9 November 2023*

For more information about this Committee please contact:

Committee Officer	<i>Richard.Doney</i> <i>Email: scrutiny@oxfordshire.gov.uk</i>
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Martin Reeves
Chief Executive

September 2023

What does this Committee review or scrutinise?

- All services and preventative activities/initiatives relating to children, young people, education, families and older people.
- Enables the council to scrutinise its statutory functions relating to children, adult social care and safeguarding. Includes public health matters where they are not covered by the Joint Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee.
- This committee will also consider matters relating to care leavers and the transition between children's and adult services

How can I have my say?

We welcome the views of the community on any issues in relation to the responsibilities of this Committee. Members of the public may ask to speak on any item on the agenda or may suggest matters which they would like the Committee to look at. **Requests to speak must be submitted to the Committee Officer below no later than 9 am 4 working day before the date of the meeting.**

About the County Council

The Oxfordshire County Council is made up of 63 councillors who are democratically elected every four years. The Council provides a range of services to Oxfordshire's 678,000 residents. These include:

schools	social & health care	libraries and museums
the fire service	roads	trading standards
land use	transport planning	waste management

Each year the Council manages £0.9 billion of public money in providing these services. Most decisions are taken by a Cabinet of 9 Councillors, which makes decisions about service priorities and spending. Some decisions will now be delegated to individual members of the Cabinet.

About Scrutiny

Scrutiny is about:

- Providing a challenge to the Cabinet
- Examining how well the Cabinet and the Authority are performing
- Influencing the Cabinet on decisions that affect local people
- Helping the Cabinet to develop Council policies
- Representing the community in Council decision making
- Promoting joined up working across the authority's work and with partners

Scrutiny is NOT about:

- Making day to day service decisions
- Investigating individual complaints.

What does this Committee do?

The Committee meets up to 4 times a year or more. It develops a work programme, which lists the issues it plans to investigate. These investigations can include whole committee investigations undertaken during the meeting, or reviews by a panel of members doing research and talking to lots of people outside of the meeting. Once an investigation is completed the Committee provides its advice to the Cabinet, the full Council or other scrutiny committees. Meetings are open to the public and all reports are available to the public unless exempt or confidential, when the items would be considered in closed session.

If you have any special requirements (such as a large print version of these papers or special access facilities) please contact the officer named on the front page, giving as much notice as possible before the meeting

A hearing loop is available at County Hall.

AGENDA

1. **Introduction and Welcome**
2. **Apologies for Absence and Temporary Appointments**
3. **Declaration of Interests - see guidance note on the back page**
4. **Petitions and Public Addresses**

Members of the public who wish to speak at this meeting can attend the meeting in person or remotely. If you wish to speak, you should contact scrutiny@oxfordshire.gov.uk no later than 09.00 on Tuesday 26 September 2023.

If you are speaking 'virtually', you may submit a written statement of your presentation to ensure that, if the technology fails, your views can still be taken into account. Written statements should be no longer than one A4 sheet.

If you do not wish to speak at the meeting but do wish to have a written statement circulated to members before the meeting, please email it to the above address by 13.00 on Friday 29 September 2023. The Committee reserves the right to share this communication, or sections of it, during the meeting.

5. Education Commission report (Pages 1 - 84)

Consideration of the report deferred from 14 September 2023

The Oxfordshire Education Commission reported to Cabinet on 19 September 2023 when Cabinet resolved to note the report.

The Independent Chair of the Commission, has been invited to present the report. Cllr Liz Brighthouse, Cabinet Member for Children, Education, and Young People's Services, Stephen Chandler, Interim Executive Director: People, Transformation, and Performance, Anne Coyle, Interim Corporate Director: Children's Services, have also been invited to answer the Committee's questions.

The Committee is recommended to consider the report, to ask any questions, and to **AGREE** any recommendations it wishes to make to Cabinet arising from the report and discussion.

6. Oxfordshire Local Area SEND Inspection (Pages 85 - 96)

The report of His Majesty's Chief Inspectorate following the Local Area SEND Inspection has been published since the Committee last met.

The Committee has also received a report by the Interim Corporate Director for Children's Services setting out the indicative action plan development process and proposed governance arrangements.

Cllr Liz Brighthouse, Deputy Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member for Children, Education, and Young People's Services, Stephen Chandler, Interim Executive Director:

People, Transformation, and Performance; and Anne Coyle, Interim Corporate Director for Children's Services, have been invited to answer questions on the reports.

The Oxfordshire Joint Health Overview & Scrutiny Committee considered the report on Thursday 21 September 2023 when it focused on Health and Wellbeing aspects. The People Overview & Scrutiny Committee is encouraged to focus on the Education aspects.

The Committee is recommended to

- (a) NOTE the report of His Majesty's Chief Inspectorate;
- (b) NOTE the indicative action plan development process and proposed governance;
- (c) AGREE any recommendations it wishes to make to Cabinet.

Close of meeting

Councillors declaring interests

General duty

You must declare any disclosable pecuniary interests when the meeting reaches the item on the agenda headed 'Declarations of Interest' or as soon as it becomes apparent to you.

What is a disclosable pecuniary interest?

Disclosable pecuniary interests relate to your employment; sponsorship (i.e. payment for expenses incurred by you in carrying out your duties as a councillor or towards your election expenses); contracts; land in the Council's area; licenses for land in the Council's area; corporate tenancies; and securities. These declarations must be recorded in each councillor's Register of Interests which is publicly available on the Council's website.

Disclosable pecuniary interests that must be declared are not only those of the member her or himself but also those member's spouse, civil partner or person they are living with as husband or wife or as if they were civil partners.

Declaring an interest

Where any matter disclosed in your Register of Interests is being considered at a meeting, you must declare that you have an interest. You should also disclose the nature as well as the existence of the interest. If you have a disclosable pecuniary interest, after having declared it at the meeting you must not participate in discussion or voting on the item and must withdraw from the meeting whilst the matter is discussed.

Members' Code of Conduct and public perception

Even if you do not have a disclosable pecuniary interest in a matter, the Members' Code of Conduct says that a member 'must serve only the public interest and must never improperly confer an advantage or disadvantage on any person including yourself' and that 'you must not place yourself in situations where your honesty and integrity may be questioned'.

Members Code – Other registrable interests

Where a matter arises at a meeting which directly relates to the financial interest or wellbeing of one of your other registerable interests then you must declare an interest. You must not participate in discussion or voting on the item and you must withdraw from the meeting whilst the matter is discussed.

Wellbeing can be described as a condition of contentedness, healthiness and happiness; anything that could be said to affect a person's quality of life, either positively or negatively, is likely to affect their wellbeing.

Other registrable interests include:

- a) Any unpaid directorships
- b) Any body of which you are a member or are in a position of general control or management and to which you are nominated or appointed by your authority.

- c) Any body (i) exercising functions of a public nature (ii) directed to charitable purposes or (iii) one of whose principal purposes includes the influence of public opinion or policy (including any political party or trade union) of which you are a member or in a position of general control or management.

Members Code – Non-registrable interests

Where a matter arises at a meeting which directly relates to your financial interest or wellbeing (and does not fall under disclosable pecuniary interests), or the financial interest or wellbeing of a relative or close associate, you must declare the interest.

Where a matter arises at a meeting which affects your own financial interest or wellbeing, a financial interest or wellbeing of a relative or close associate or a financial interest or wellbeing of a body included under other registrable interests, then you must declare the interest.

In order to determine whether you can remain in the meeting after disclosing your interest the following test should be applied:

Where a matter affects the financial interest or well-being:

- a) to a greater extent than it affects the financial interests of the majority of inhabitants of the ward affected by the decision and;
- b) a reasonable member of the public knowing all the facts would believe that it would affect your view of the wider public interest.

You may speak on the matter only if members of the public are also allowed to speak at the meeting. Otherwise you must not take part in any discussion or vote on the matter and must not remain in the room unless you have been granted a dispensation.

Divisions Affected - All

People Overview & Scrutiny Committee

14 September 2023

**Time for Change:
Improving Educational Opportunity
for All Oxfordshire's Children and Young People.
*A report by the Oxfordshire Education Commission***

Report by the Interim Corporate Director for Children's Services

RECOMMENDATION

1. The Committee is **RECOMMENDED** to
 - (a) **CONSIDER** the report of the Oxfordshire Education Commission;
 - (b) **ASK** any questions;
 - (c) **AGREE** any recommendations it wishes to make to Cabinet.

Executive Summary

2. In Autumn 2022, the Council established an independently-chaired Oxfordshire Education Commission to consider how the Council, collectively with all state-funded schools, other education settings, and partners including children and families, could plan to sustain improving outcomes for all Oxfordshire children.
3. This was initially as a response to the education white paper *Opportunity for All: Strong Schools with Great Teachers* which was expected to lead to the Schools Bill. Government announced that the Schools Bill would not progress in December 2022 but the Council agreed to continue with the Commission.
4. The Commission reports in paragraph 2.2.1 that "overall, pupils in Oxfordshire tend to achieve good academic outcomes compared to national averages" but notes that the data shows "there are certain demographic groups who achieve poorer outcomes, as well as locality difference."
5. The report will be published alongside the agenda for the meeting of Cabinet on 19 September 2023 and Cabinet has been recommended to note the report.
6. The Council is very grateful to Gail Tolley, the Chair, and the nine members of the Commission for their commitment and diligence. Their work involved wide consultation and engagement as well as detailed analysis.

7. The Commission sets out 17 proposals for the Council along with schools and other partners to consider.
8. As the Chair notes in her foreword, the Commission has been assured that action will be forthcoming on behalf of all children and young people in Oxfordshire schools. Officers will consider the Commission's report and its proposals in full and will submit a proposed response and action plan to Cabinet for its approval.
9. The Cabinet Member for Children, Education, and Young People's Services as well as officers would be grateful for the input of the Committee in considering how best to respond to the Commission's proposals and into the implementation of the action plan in response.

Corporate Policies and Priorities

10. The establishment of the Commission and its proposals relate explicitly to the following priorities: tackle inequalities in Oxfordshire; prioritise the health and wellbeing of residents; create opportunities for children and young people to reach their full potential.

Financial Implications

11. Consideration of the Commission's proposals will include assessment of the financial implications involved.

Comments checked by:

Lorna Baxter,
Director of Finance, lorna.baxter@oxfordshire.gov.uk

Legal Implications

12. Consideration of the Commission's proposals will include assessment of any legal implications involved.

Comments checked by:

Anita Bradley,
Director of Law and Governance, anita.bradley@oxfordshire.gov.uk

Staff Implications

13. Consideration of the Commission's proposals will include assessment of any staffing implications involved.

Equality & Inclusion Implications

14. Consideration of the Commission's proposals will include assessment of any equality and inclusion implications involved.

Anne Coyle

Interim Corporate Director for Children's Services

September 2023

Annex: Time for Change: Improving Educational Opportunity for All
Oxfordshire's Children and Young People. *A report by the Oxfordshire
Education Commission*

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**Time for Change: Improving Educational Opportunity for All
Oxfordshire's Children and Young People**
A report by the Oxfordshire Education Commission

September 2023

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Foreword

The education landscape in England has experienced significant change in the past decade with local authorities and schools needing to be proactive and adaptable to stay focused on collective responsibilities for improving the wellbeing, including learning outcomes, of all children and young people. In 2022, in the period following the disruption to learning of the pandemic, Oxfordshire County Council recognised that it needed to reflect and reset ways of working between the Council and schools in the best interests of all children, particularly the most disadvantaged.

The Oxfordshire Education Commission 2023 has been privileged to be given a broad remit to undertake this reflection and develop the desired 'call to action' for improved local area collaboration. Section 5 of this report has 17 proposals for the Council along with schools and other partners to consider. As a commission, we have been assured that action will be forthcoming on behalf of all children and young people in Oxfordshire schools.

I would like to thank the members of the commission for their outstanding commitment. They are all volunteers who have given their time to provide invaluable local knowledge, professional expertise and a relentless focus on the needs and ambitions of children and young people. As a commission we have been expertly assisted since March through Oxford University Innovation by Alice Tawell (Research Consultant), whose skills have greatly enhanced this report. Thanks are also due to Kathy Smith for administrative support to the meetings of the commission and Tim Brock for extensive logistical support to the chair and the work of the commission throughout this period.

A primary school pupil focus group told us that 'nothing's impossible here'. We agree.

Gail Tolley

Independent Chair

1. Introduction

1.1 Oxfordshire County Council (OCC) took an innovative approach in Autumn 2022, following publication of the Education White Paper **Opportunity for All: Strong Schools with Great Teachers** (March 2022) and the subsequent development of a Schools Bill, to set up an independently chaired Oxfordshire Education Commission (OEC).¹ The OEC was intended to consider how, collectively with all state funded schools, other education settings and partners including children and families, OCC could plan to sustain improving outcomes for all Oxfordshire children and young people in line with the expectations of the Schools Bill.

1.2 In December 2022 the Secretary of State for Education announced that the Schools Bill would not be progressing but the government remained committed to the objectives that underpinned the Bill and the policy positions in the White Paper. The leadership of OCC determined to continue with the OEC without the specific focus of the Schools Bill. This commitment was sustained through the changes at Chief Executive and Director of Children’s Services (DCS) level during 2023. Broadly, the terms of reference provided to the OEC were to:

1. Present a stocktake of the current educational outcomes for pupils in Oxfordshire
2. Consider the role of local government and other stakeholders in supporting education in Oxfordshire
3. Assess the current organisational landscape and make proposals for future direction in line with the White Paper Opportunity for All.

1.3 Appointments were made to the commission by OCC between November and early January, allowing for the first meeting of the OEC on 19 January 2023. The membership of the OEC comprised:

- Gail Tolley - Independent Chair
- Hilary Emery - Governor (Chair of Governors Eynsham Community Primary School)
- Jan Davison-Fischer - University (Interim Head of School of Education, Oxford Brookes University)
- Bryn Gibson - Primary (Headteacher Harwell Primary School)
- Katie Geran-Haq - Primary (Headteacher Windale Primary School)
- Paul James - Secondary (CEO River Learning Trust)
- Simon Knight - Special (Joint Headteacher Frank Wise Special School)
- Jeremy Long - Business (Former Chair of Oxfordshire Local Enterprise Partnership)
- Martha O’Curry - Governor (Combe Primary School)
- Ian Thompson - University (Associate Professor, University of Oxford)

1.4 Administrative as well as logistical support has been provided to the OEC by OCC and from March – August 2023 an experienced researcher, Alice Tawell, sourced from the University of Oxford has provided additional part time expertise.

¹ A full list of acronyms used in this report is provided in Appendix A.

1.5 Evidence gathering commenced in December 2022 by the independent chair with key strategic educational partners: Archdiocese of Birmingham (RC); Diocese of Portsmouth (RC); Diocese of Oxford (CofE); and the Department for Education (DfE) Regional Director (former Regional Schools Commissioner).

1.6 The OEC met in person on five occasions between January and June and once online in July. The first two meetings concentrated on reviewing and analysing data relating to pupil outcomes and developing a workplan. At the third meeting in March, following analysis and consideration of the data provided by OCC, discussion of the issues raised by members and a recognition of the limited time scale we confirmed the major issue and our main interrogative to be:

‘How do we improve outcomes for those who find it hardest to succeed in Oxfordshire schools?’

1.7 Members agreed a methodology for additional gathering of information from interviews with practitioners, service providers in the LA and beyond, other partners including the third sector and parents and children and young people between March and June to supplement the various meetings that had been attended by the chair since December.

1.8 The meeting in May focused on reviewing the fieldwork and emerging themes, with the meeting in June taking the form of a whole day workshop to review all the evidence gathered and identify key themes and provisional recommendations. We met in July to consider the drafting of the report and commission members commented on the draft report in August prior to a revised expectation that the Commission report to Cabinet in September 2023.

1.9 For the purposes of this report, the word schools is taken to cover all state funded provision regardless of the form of governance. This reflects local concern about too sharp a divide being made between academies and maintained schools (community or voluntary aided) and that the time is right for all schools to work collaboratively with the Local Authority (LA) to solve local, complex issues.

1.10 The report has been structured in line with the terms of reference provided by OCC. It was emphasised at the start that this was to be an Education rather than specifically SEND Commission, although it was clear that matters relating to the support for children and young people with SEND had a high profile across the local area. The OEC was also not asked to consider whether the deployment of resources meets current need. This is for OCC to determine along with Schools Forum and other partners.

2. Stocktake of Educational Outcomes for Pupils in Oxfordshire

2.1 Introduction

In this section, we provide a stocktake of educational outcomes for pupils in Oxfordshire. Drawing on data for the 2021/22 school year, provided by the Learning and School Improvement team and Virtual School for Looked After Children and Care Leavers at OCC, as well as national data published by the DfE, we explore who according to the official data are finding it hardest to succeed in Oxfordshire schools. The section provides a snapshot account, with further detail provided in Appendix B, including comparisons with statistical neighbours.

2.2 Overall outcomes

2.2.1 Overall, pupils in Oxfordshire tend to achieve good academic outcomes compared to national averages.

2.2.2 In 2021/22, Oxfordshire ranked in the top quartile nationally for the percentage of pupils achieving a good level of development in the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS).

2.2.3 At Key Stage 1 (KS1), the percentage of pupils achieving at least the expected standard in reading and mathematics was above the national average. However, the percentage of pupils achieving expected standards in writing, and phonics in Year 1, was slightly below the national average. At the end of Year 2, the percentage of pupils working at the expected level in phonics was higher than the national average.

2.2.4 At Key Stage 2 (KS2), while the percentage of pupils achieving at least the expected standard in reading was in-line with the national average, the percentage of pupils in Oxfordshire achieving expected standards for writing, mathematics, and reading, writing and mathematics (RWM) combined was lower than average.

2.2.5 At Key Stage 4 (KS4) Oxfordshire's Attainment 8 score and the percentage of pupils achieving a grade 5 or above in both English and mathematics were both above the national average.

2.2.6 Despite the generally good academic outcomes for pupils in Oxfordshire, the data suggests that there are certain demographic groups who achieve poorer outcomes, as well as locality differences.

2.3 Disadvantaged pupils

2.3.1 According to the 2022 data, disadvantaged pupils² in Oxfordshire perform less well than their peers nationally at all key stages, and in relation to many comparable 'statistical neighbours'.³

2.3.2 Concerningly, Oxfordshire ranks in the bottom quartile nationally for the proportion of disadvantaged pupils achieving (1) a good level of development in the early years (6%pts below national), (2) at least the expected standard in phonics in Year 1 (10%pts below national), (3) at least the expected standard in reading, writing, mathematics and RWM combined at KS1 (5%pts, 10%pts, 7%pts, 9%pts below national respectively) and KS2 (5%pts, 7%pts, 9%pts, 10%pts below national respectively) and (4) Attainment 8 scores at KS4 (2.9%pts below national).

2.3.3 In relation to almost all measures, the Free School Meals (FSM) and disadvantage gap has widened more in Oxfordshire compared to changes in the gap nationally. For example, the FSM gap in KS1 phonics reduced nationally between 2019 and 2022 from minus 18 percentage points to minus 17 percentage points, whereas in Oxfordshire the FSM gap, which is already wider than the national gap, increased from minus 20 percentage points to minus 27 percentage points.

2.4 Special educational needs and disabilities (SEND)

2.4.1 In 2021/22, outcomes for pupils with SEND in Oxfordshire were mixed relative to the national average for this group.

2.4.2 While the outcomes for pupils at SEN Support were generally in-line with or above the national average for this group in the early years, they varied in KS1 and KS2, and by KS4 outcomes for this group were below the national average.

2.4.3 The percentage of pupils with an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) in Oxfordshire achieving a good level of development in the early years was below the national average for this group in 2021/22, as was the percentage of pupils with an EHCP working at the expected level in phonics in Year 1. However, pupils with EHCPs achieved above the national average for this group in all other areas and key stages.

2.5 Ethnicity

2.5.1 According to the data for 2021/22, pupils of minority ethnicities performed less well than their peers nationally at all key stages. Black heritage pupils were found to have the lowest outcomes among their peers.

² Pupils are defined as disadvantaged if they are known to have been eligible for Free School Meals at any point in the past six years, if they are recorded as a looked after child, or having been adopted.

³ Oxfordshire's statistical neighbours are: Bath & N.E. Somerset, Bracknell Forest, Buckinghamshire, Cambridgeshire, Gloucestershire, Hampshire, Hertfordshire, West Berkshire, West Sussex, and Wiltshire.

2.5.2 In 2022, the percentages of Black, Asian and Other ethnic background pupils achieving a good level of development in the early years were below the national average. The percentage of children of Black heritage achieving a good level of development in Oxfordshire decreased between 2018 and 2022 and the decline was steeper than the decline seen nationally and in the statistical neighbour LAs.

2.5.3 At KS1, while performance was at or above the national average in each subject for most ethnic groups, Black heritage pupils performed below the national average in all areas (reading, writing and mathematics). The percentage of Mixed heritage pupils achieving the expected standard in writing was also below the national average. Boys of Black heritage achieved lower scores than girls of Black heritage in all areas, a trend that is also seen nationally and regionally.

2.5.4 The percentage of pupils of Black heritage working at the expected level in phonics in Year 1 in Oxfordshire decreased between 2018 and 2022. While this decrease was more than the decrease seen nationally, it was not as large as the decrease in the statistical neighbour LAs. A general decline in the percentage of Asian heritage pupils working at the expected level in phonics in Year 1 was also seen nationally, locally and in the statistical neighbour LAs between 2018 and 2022. The smallest decline was in Oxfordshire.

2.5.5 By the end of Year 2, the percentage of Black heritage pupils that met the expected standard in phonics was slightly below the national average.

2.5.6 At KS2, the percentage of Black, Asian and Mixed heritage pupils in Oxfordshire achieving at least the expected standard in reading, writing and mathematics was below the national average.

2.5.7 At KS4, Attainment 8 for pupils of Black heritage in Oxfordshire was below the national average, placing Oxfordshire in the bottom quartile nationally with only 16 LAs reporting a lower score for this pupil group. The Attainment 8 score for pupils from a Mixed heritage background was also slightly lower in Oxfordshire than the national average. While the Attainment 8 score was highest for Chinese heritage pupils, the Attainment 8 score for this group was lower than the national average.

2.6 Children We Care For

2.6.1 Data provided by Oxfordshire Virtual School showed a dramatic decline in the percentage of Children We Care For (CWCF) who passed their phonics check in Year 1 from 90 per cent in 2018/19 (higher than the national and local average for all pupils) to 25 per cent in 2020/21 (lower than the national and local average for all pupils). While there was a general decline in the percentage of all pupils passing their phonics check in Year 1 in 2021/22 both nationally and locally, the decline was larger for CWCF in Oxfordshire.

2.6.2 The percentage of CWCF in Oxfordshire who passed their Year 2 phonics check also declined slightly between 2018/19 and 2021/22 (63.6% to 61.1%). Though the percentage of pupils passing the check in 2021/22 was much higher than the percentage of pupils passing the Year 1 check, it was still below national and local averages for all children.

2.6.3 Data available for KS2 also showed that the percentage of CWCF achieving the expected standard in reading, writing, mathematics and RWM combined was below national and local averages, as well as the national average for CWCF. While the percentage of CWCF achieving the expected standard in reading increased slightly between 2018/19 and 2021/22 (33.3% to 34.8%), the percentage of CWCF achieving the expected standards in writing, mathematics and RWM decreased.

2.7 Locality differences

2.7.1 The data indicates that locality differences may account for differences in pupil outcomes in Oxfordshire. Here the data for nine localities in Oxfordshire are compared against the statistical neighbour average. On the whole, pupils in Abingdon, Oxford City, Wantage and Faringdon, and Witney generally achieved lower academic outcomes relative to the statistical neighbour average. In Oxford City outcomes across all key stages and measures were below the statistical neighbour average in 2021/22. This is compared to pupils in Banbury, Bicester, Didcot, Thame, and Woodstock who, on average, tended to achieve above the statistical neighbour average in most key stages.

2.7.2 In Abingdon and Wantage and Faringdon, pupils eligible for FSM, achieved below the statistical neighbour average across eight key stage measures in 2022 (Early Years Foundation Stage Profile (EYFSP), Year 1 phonics, Year 2 phonics, KS1 reading, KS1 writing, KS1 mathematics, KS2 RWM, KS4 Attainment 8). In Oxford City, Thame, and Witney, pupils eligible for FSM scored below the statistical neighbour average in five out of eight measures. In Bicester, and Didcot outcomes for pupils eligible for FSM were below the statistical neighbour average in four out of eight measures. Pupils eligible for FSM tended to perform better in Banbury, with Banbury scoring above the statistical neighbour average in six out of eight measures.

2.7.3 All pupils, and pupils eligible for FSM scored above the statistical neighbour average across all key stages in Woodstock.

2.7.4 Attainment 8 scores in seven out of the nine localities in Oxfordshire were below the statistical neighbour average for all pupils, and pupils eligible for FSM. All pupils, and pupils eligible for FSM achieved above the statistical neighbour average in Didcot and Woodstock.

2.7.5 Overall, pupil outcomes tend to be better in Woodstock and Banbury and worst in Abingdon, and Wantage and Faringdon.

2.9 Absence

2.9.1 The attendance report presented to the People Overview and Scrutiny Committee in March 2023 stated that:

During the 2021/22 academic year 7.8% of sessions were missed due to absence in Oxfordshire, this is above (worse) than reported nationally (7.6% of sessions). Persistent absence in Oxfordshire was 22.1%, [this is] below (better than) the national average of 22.5%. Severe absence [over 50% absence] was in-line with the national average with a rate

of 11.7% (Performance and Information Team (Education), Oxfordshire County Council 2023, p.1).

2.9.2. In Oxfordshire primary schools, overall absence was above (worse than) the national average in 2021/22, whereas persistent absence was below (better than) the national average and severe absence was in-line with the national average. However, one in eight primary school children were persistently absent and 0.5 per cent of primary school pupils were severely absent.

2.9.3 In Oxfordshire secondary schools, overall, persistent, and severe absence rates were all above (worse than) the national average in 2021/22. One in four secondary school children were persistently absent and 2.6 per cent were severely absent.

2.9.4 In comparison, the overall, persistent and severe absence rates from Oxfordshire special schools were all lower (better than) the national average.

2.9.5 When looking at absence rates by pupil characteristics, rates were highest for pupils with (1) an EHCP, (2) on the autistic spectrum, (3) from Travellers of Irish Heritage and Gypsy/ Roma backgrounds. Persistent absence was highest for pupils with a primary need of social, emotional and mental health (SEMH) difficulties.

2.10 Exclusion

2.10.1 National data collected through the school census and published by the DfE in 2023, showed that between 2018/19 and 2021/22 the number of permanent exclusions in Oxfordshire fell from 64 to 30. Of the 30 pupils permanently excluded in 2021/22, eight were from state funded primary schools and 22 from state funded secondary schools. Half were eligible for FSM and 19 had SEND.

2.10.2 The rate of permanent exclusions in 2021/22 in Oxfordshire was 0.03 per cent of the school population, which was lower than the national average (0.08%). Rates of permanent exclusion in Oxfordshire were higher for pupils from Black and Mixed backgrounds, those eligible for FSM, those with an EHCP, and those with SEN without an EHCP.

2.10.3 In comparison to the decrease in number of permanent exclusions, the number of suspensions rose in Oxfordshire between 2018/19 and 2021/22 from 5,120 to 6,555. Of the 6,555 suspensions, 5,608 were issued to secondary school pupils, 902 to primary school pupils and 45 to pupils attending special schools. Forty-one per cent of all suspensions were issued to pupils eligible for FSM and 57 per cent were issued to pupils with SEND.

2.10.4 The rate of suspensions in Oxfordshire in 2021/22 was slightly below the national average (6.66% in Oxfordshire compared to 6.91% nationally). Rates of suspension in Oxfordshire were higher for pupils from Mixed and Black backgrounds, those eligible for FSM, those with an EHCP, and those with SEN without an EHCP (DfE 2023a).

2.11 Other data sources

2.11.1 It must be noted that the conclusions drawn in this section are based on the data made available to the Commission and others may wish to look at additional measures, for example, Progress 8. In order to dig deeper into why some children and young people find it harder to succeed in Oxfordshire schools, it would also be beneficial to combine data from across different services (e.g., education, health, social care, youth justice etc.) in order to build a more holistic picture of young people's lives and the root causes of emerging need. This in turn may help to respond in ways that are smarter, coordinate intervention and move towards more joined-up working. Existing data sources that could be drawn or built on include the Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (JSNA), and the Be Successful Data collected and reported by the Safeguarding in Education subgroup of the Oxfordshire Safeguarding Children's Board.

2.11.2 While it is important to analyse and monitor patterns in national and local data, it is also acknowledged that quantitative data can conceal as much as it reveals. In order to fully understand the complexity and interrelated nature of the challenges faced in Oxfordshire, it is important to supplement and contextualise the stocktake data with qualitative insights from key stakeholders including children and young people. In Section 3, we outline the methodology adopted to gather views from key stakeholders for this report, and in Section 4 the findings from the analysis of these data are presented.

3. Methodology

3.1 The Chair of the OEC was commissioned initially for 25 days to undertake this piece of work. In addition to meetings with the DfE Regional Director and Diocesan representatives, the Chair attended local Heads and Governor network meetings to introduce the work of the Commission and familiarise herself with the education landscape in Oxfordshire. She also visited schools and listened to the views of children and young people.

3.2. Weekly meetings were held between the Chair and senior Children, Education and Families (CEF) officers in the LA to support effective communication and evidence gathering. The Chair also attended key OCC meetings with councillors, and a range of other senior Council officers.

3.3 Having reviewed the data presented in Section 2, the Commission set out to answer the following question: *How do we improve outcomes for those who find it hardest to succeed in Oxfordshire schools?*

3.4 Evidence gathering took place between March and June. Through a combination of purposive and convenience sampling, stakeholders from across different sectors were invited by the Commission members and through the Council to be interviewed or provide written responses to the following questions:

1. From your perspective, who do you think are the children and young people who find it hardest to succeed in Oxfordshire schools?
2. What are the things that are not helping children and young people to succeed?
3. What are the system level barriers that prevent children and young people from succeeding?
 - a. Are there any specific barriers in your experience? In your local area? (Please specify your local area).
4. What do you think would help children and young people who are finding it hardest to succeed?
 - a. What support is needed to help these children and young people to succeed?
5. Can you identify any examples of good practice of working with children and young people who are finding it hardest to succeed?

3.5 Oral consent was sought from all adult respondents and assent from children and young people. Respondents were asked for their permission to use direct quotations in this report. All responses have been anonymised.

3.6 In total, 63 responses were gathered from 76 adult respondents. Twenty-eight individual, paired or group interviews were conducted by Commission members and 35 written responses were received. Broken down by stakeholder group this included: four responses from FE/HE; 14 responses from OCC (17 respondents); one city/district council (on behalf of three councils); six parent/carer responses (from eight parents/carers); six responses from the community and voluntary sector; five

responses from statutory partners (six respondents); and 27 responses from schools and alternative provision providers (32 respondents across a range of operational and governance roles in primary, secondary and special schools).

3.7 Focus groups were also held with eleven groups of primary school pupils from across four schools, four groups of secondary school pupils across one school and young people from the Children in Care Council. An additional primary school aged pupil was interviewed individually. Headteachers of each school were asked to select groups of pupils with different demographic characteristics (i.e., disadvantaged children, children with SEND, children who had experienced trauma and minority ethnic pupils).

3.8 Child-friendly interview schedules were designed for the primary and secondary pupil focus groups. The children and young people were asked to reflect on what they thought helps (or could help) children to learn in school and what does not help, why they thought some children and young people might find it more difficult to get on well in school and whether they thought there are any particular groups of children and young people who might find school more difficult than others. Finally, they were asked what they would like to do when they grow up/leave school, and the secondary aged pupils were asked if they felt schools prepared young people for their futures and what job opportunities they thought might be available for young people in Oxfordshire.

3.9 Additional information and best practice examples were sought from a comparator County Council Children's Services Department.

3.10 Several reports and additional pieces of information were also submitted to the Commission by different stakeholders.

3.11 The evidence was reviewed by all Commission members and initial themes were identified at a Commission meeting in June 2023. Further coding iterations took place remotely following the meeting with assistance from the research consultant. Final themes were reviewed by the Commission members in July 2023.

3.12 The themes presented are based on the views of the people who responded to the Commission and therefore may not represent the views of all stakeholders in Oxfordshire. Additional research is warranted to further explore the findings presented in Section 4.

4. Stakeholder Views

4.1 Introduction

4.1.1 In Section 2 we provided a stocktake of educational outcomes in Oxfordshire. Drawing on data from the 2021/22 school year, as well as previous years where available, we identified stark inequalities in outcomes especially in relation to the most disadvantaged and vulnerable children and young people. For the purposes of this report, 'vulnerable children' are defined as any children at greater risk of experiencing physical or emotional harm and/or experiencing poor outcomes because of one or more factors in their lives. In Section 4, we turn to the views of key stakeholders to further interrogate who finds it hardest to succeed in Oxfordshire schools and the factors that may be acting as barriers to success. Adopting a strengths-based approach, we then consider what could work to help improve outcomes for those who are finding it hardest to succeed. Here we recognise existing resources and mechanisms that could be built upon to help address the identified inequalities and support *all* of Oxfordshire's children to thrive.

4.2 Defining success

4.2.1 In the stocktake, educational outcome measures were used as proxies for "success". In our conversations with key stakeholders, a number of people challenged this definition of success seeing it as too narrow and called for a more nuanced understanding which encapsulates a broader range of outcomes and acknowledges that success may look different and be experienced differently by every child:

"Success" is different for every child. Is it passing SATs? Is it one pass at GCSE or 5? Is it four A levels or one and at what grades? Is it an apprenticeship? Or is it being able to get a job they can do now because the most important thing is income? For some, just getting themselves into school and staying for the school day is a success. (Schools and AP respondent 1)

What the above insights imply is that the way success is understood and measured has implications for practice in schools and may direct professionals' primary areas of concern.

4.2.2. Expectations of the wider system from the DfE and Ofsted, and the interpretation of these expectations by schools, also impact what is understood by the term "success". The current Ofsted framework has a greater focus on the curriculum and whole-school experience than previous frameworks, but schools are still held to account for headline outcomes which inform DfE performance tables. The value of attendance in school and of high examination outcomes are well understood. However, the complexities which impact such measures are numerous and stakeholders reported there is a risk that schools may be less inclusive if feeling under pressure to meet expectations that may not be suitable for particular pupils. It is important that these measures are used as the prompt to ask questions to better understand what lies behind them rather than responding to them at face value alone.

4.2.3 There is also a need to reflect carefully on what we consider to be effective outcomes within the specialist sector, how these are determined and how they reflect the individual requirements of the children educated outside of mainstream settings. There is little in the way of consensus in this area, as outcomes are often specific to needs of individual children, but that does not mean that we should shy away from interrogating the impact of education on those within the specialist sector in Oxfordshire and ensure that they are enabled to maximise their individual potential.

4.2.4 Some participants suggested alternative definitions of success which may help to promote more inclusive school cultures by focusing on preparedness for the next stage for our most vulnerable children and young people rather than headline outcomes and promoting a “whole child” approach (Schools and AP respondent 7):

Another way to define ‘successful outcome’- for secondary and primary is: “on leaving the setting, the student feels confident that they can cope with the next stage, whatever that is”. By confident, I mean they have a feeling of self-worth. That they belong, they do not feel ‘excluded’ or ‘unwanted’. They have acquired enough knowledge to survive the next stage.
(Schools and AP respondent 1)

4.2.5 While the outcomes data presented in the stocktake in Section 2 provides one framing of success and the challenges faced in Oxfordshire, the stakeholder conversations offered further insights into who may be finding it hardest to succeed in Oxfordshire schools, both in terms of educational outcomes and more broadly.

4.3 Who are the children who find it hardest to succeed?

4.3.1 When asked who they thought found it hardest to succeed in Oxfordshire schools, the different stakeholder groups drew on different sources of information including official data as well as their own professional and personal experiences. Mirroring the findings in the stocktake of educational outcomes in Section 2, the most commonly cited groups were disadvantaged pupils and pupils with SEND. Some respondents also mentioned CWCF, children from certain minority ethnic groups and non-attenders. Two (possibly overlapping) additional groups raised, were children who have experienced multiple adverse childhood experiences (ACEs), and those with social care involvement. Some respondents also felt that children with a lack of parental support, or whose parents had negative experiences of education were also amongst those who may find it hardest to succeed. Other groups mentioned were those who fall below thresholds for support (e.g., do not meet social care, FSM, pupil premium, SEND thresholds) and children with unmet needs, whose behaviour is sometimes misunderstood. Socially deprived and isolated pupils, and children and young people who experience bullying were also discussed by some, as were pupils for whom English is an Additional Language (EAL). A small number of respondents also mentioned the following groups of young people: Children Missing Education (CME); disengaged pupils; in year transfers; pupils who are not school ready; pupils who experience poor transition; pupils who are medically unwell / have health issues; service children; and young carers. In addition to many of the groups already mentioned, some of the children and young people spoken to also mentioned children who are ‘tired’ as finding it hardest to succeed.

4.4 There needs to be ‘a reckoning’

4.4.1 While the data presented in Section 2 (Stocktake of educational outcomes for pupils in Oxfordshire) mainly focused on the outcomes data for 2021/22, inequalities in outcomes have been persistent and enduring in Oxfordshire in relation to disadvantaged and vulnerable pupils. Whilst those working in schools and the wider system will have taken actions to address these inequalities, there has been no collective call to action that has led to significant change across the county. As one respondent from the community and voluntary sector described:

Oxfordshire hasn't had a reckoning about how badly it does particularly for children from disadvantaged backgrounds. (Community and voluntary sector respondent 3).

4.4.2 Respondents described the inequalities faced by some young people as known unknowns whereby professionals are aware of the inequalities, but they do not necessarily know how or have the resources to address them. The extract below from a conversation with one of the statutory partners illustrates this point:

They are a small group of children (10% in his view) who are cut adrift and know that they are failing while staff find it hard to know how to help them and the focus is on the majority who can succeed. As the cohort across Oxfordshire is small it is hard to find resources (he drew the comparison with London Challenge where high percentage of disadvantage led to substantial funding for staff and support). Staff do not understand why these young people do not do well or the links to trauma and other factors beyond the school. (Statutory partners respondent 1)

4.4.3 In order to understand what needs to change, in the following sections we first look at what was seen by key stakeholders, including children and young people, as not helping children and young people in Oxfordshire to succeed, before turning to look at what could help to achieve more equitable outcomes for all children and young people.

4.5 Things that do not help

4.5.1 In this section we outline different issues that were identified by respondents as barriers to success.

4.5.2 Societal issues

4.5.2.1 Growing social inequalities were identified by many as the backdrop to the issues faced by young people and their families in Oxfordshire. Respondents noted how the two-fold setback of the global pandemic followed by the cost-of-living crisis have pushed more families into poverty and led to increased cases of neglect and child and parent mental health difficulties. Disruptions caused by school closures during the pandemic were seen to have had an enduring impact on young people, particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds and cohorts at points of transitions (i.e., from

nursery to primary, primary to secondary, secondary to post-16, and changing schools), and resulted in increased academic and behavioural difficulties and attendance issues. One respondent noted that the increased levels of absence since the Covid pandemic are higher than national rates in Oxfordshire, with absence rates reportedly higher among disadvantaged children and children in receipt of FSM (City/district council respondent 1). As described by a respondent from the FE/HE sector:

The coronavirus pandemic and its associated lockdowns upended our lives and presented challenges and consequences that we are still reckoning with. Children living with everyday precarity and vulnerabilities due to social and economic inequalities are the worst affected by the pandemic: failing to engage with lived uncertainties means stopping short of addressing educational inequalities. (FE/HE respondent 4)

4.5.2.2 Several respondents also raised concerns over child criminal exploitation, including county lines drug trafficking, and the impact on young people at risk of or who have been excluded from school or attending alternative provision.

4.5.2.3 Awareness of increasing numbers of pupils with SEND entering the school system and concerns regarding the funding and capacity to meet need was also raised by a number of respondents. While this issue was understood to predate the pandemic, one OCC respondent described how being born during the pandemic had left some children with ‘significant communication and social emotional issues’ (OCC respondent 1) due to a lack of early socialisation. Loss of social connectedness was another issue, predating but possibly exacerbated by the pandemic, that was seen to be affecting young people’s physical, emotional and academic development. One statutory partner working in mental health described how the demise of community organisations has resulted in schools becoming increasingly vital for providing a sense of connectedness for young people. When schools closed during the pandemic, this sense of connectedness may therefore have been affected. Respondents talked about how the use of social media had become a lifeline for children to communicate during the pandemic but may have also had a negative impact on some.

4.5.2.4 As well as national issues, local issues specific to Oxfordshire were also identified by a number of respondents as impacting educational outcomes in Oxfordshire.

4.5.3 Oxfordshire issues

4.5.3.1 Oxfordshire’s population is growing and diversifying, with OCC’s *Strategic plan 2023-2025* noting that the population has increased by 10.9 per cent since the 2011 census (OCC 2023). This increase, which is above national growth, has put pressure on local services and infrastructure. Despite the overall population growth, primary schools across the county are seeing falling admissions due to a lower birth rate, though this is in part being offset by continued immigration (City/district council respondent 1). Oxfordshire is also one of the most expensive places to live in England, with the cost of housing and childcare fast becoming prohibitive to those wishing to work in the county, especially those in the public sector. Some new housing has been built across the county, but there is a shortage of affordable and social housing. While the economy is strong in Oxfordshire, there is a geography of

disadvantage, with ‘pockets of poverty across the county and within the city’ (OCC respondent 1). Ten neighbourhoods within the county fall within the 20 per cent most deprived in England (OCC 2023), six of which are in the city of Oxford. While the population is growing, it is also transient due to, amongst other factors, having a number of military bases in the county. The rural landscape of the county, and poor transport links, also pose challenges for some young people, families and schools.

4.5.3.2 During one of the conversations for this report, a respondent from the community and voluntary sector described how:

There is something interesting about Oxfordshire having seen what is going on elsewhere. Oxfordshire has pockets of deprivation... and in some ways, you would be much better off being poor or disadvantaged in say [Northern Town] because there are many more universal services supporting families. (Community and voluntary sector respondent 3)

4.5.3.3 Next, we turn to look at the issues identified at the LA level.

4.5.4 Lack of shared strategic vision

4.5.4.1 Respondents working within the LA described a lack of strategic vision, planning and leadership within the council and CEF particularly, as well as a lack of coordination with commissioning, and siloed working between teams and services. Respondents spoke about poor communication channels and data sharing systems, including a ‘badly managed implementation of a new Management Information System’ (OCC respondent 1) and a ‘lack of flow of info from DLT [Directorate Leadership Team] back to Heads of Service’ (OCC respondent 3). The absence of streamlined and coordinated interagency working was seen to lead to, at times, ad hocery, duplication and joint working becoming dependent on relationships and ‘who you know’ (OCC respondent 3) ‘rather than planned forums with shared outcome focus’ (OCC respondent 5). The lack of join up and shared strategic vision was not seen to reside only within the LA but also between the LA and other partner agencies and key stakeholders including schools.

4.5.5 Fractured relationships, fractured working and fractured support

4.5.5.1 The drive towards a more autonomous education system in England has altered the position and role of LAs and their relationships with schools. According to the *Academies programme end of year report – 2022*, produced by OCC, by the end of 2022 there were 168 academies (publicly funded schools independent of the LA) in Oxfordshire compared to 136 maintained schools. Thirty-three out of 34 secondary schools are academies, 108 out of 233 primary schools are academies, and nine out of 14 special schools are academies. Seventy-one per cent of pupils in mainstream schools are educated in academies; 49 per cent of primary pupils and 97 per cent of secondary pupils (OCC, 2023). While academisation has been in process for over ten years, the LA and schools continue to grapple with the changes to the education and governance landscape. Cuts to local services (discussed further below) and the altered remit of some LA teams has led to confusion over who is responsible and accountable for certain issues, for example attendance, and who should be delivering particular

services, for example completing strengths and needs assessments and coordinating Team Around the Family (TAF) meetings. There was a feeling among respondents that this lack of clarity, coupled with funding and capacity constraints, had led to fractured relationships, fractured working and fractured support and the playing of the blame game.

4.5.5.2 As well as fragile relationships between the LA and schools, the absence of a cohesive sense of partnership between schools was also described by some respondents. For example, it was noted how the head teacher networks are not always well attended and as such are not necessarily representative. While there were some positive examples of schools working together within their Trusts and through local forums, such as the Fair Access Panels, the blame game also seemed to extend to schools, particularly between primary and secondary schools: 'We get them secondary ready and won't accept secondary schools blaming us' (Schools and AP respondent 29). Schools and AP respondent 29 noted how there is a 'need to look at ways to facilitate more cross school CPD [continuing professional development] and be open and not be defensive. [We] need less blame culture on common problems.'

4.5.5.3 Trusting relationships between different agencies was also seen to be affected by agencies failing to deliver on their promises.

4.5.6 Talking the talk but not walking the walk

4.5.6.1 Respondents described an all talk but no action culture in Oxfordshire in which an abundance of consultations and reports have been commissioned and conducted into various educational issues over the years but have not resulted in action or change. Some respondents felt that the same conversations were being had over and over again and talked about stakeholder survey fatigue. The idea of talking the talk but not walking the walk also captured the frustration some schools felt when conversations were had, and issues acknowledged, but they could not feel a sense of movement or change. This lack of movement was seen to diminish trust and feed the fractious and, at times, oppositional relationship between schools and the LA. The OEC is clear that this report is not just more talk but an active call to action.

4.5.7 Struggling (with) systems

4.5.7.1 One of the most pressing issues described by respondents in Oxfordshire was systems being under stress and professionals, parents/carers and children and young people struggling to access support.

4.5.7.2 Capacity and resources

Lack of capacity and resources were described across local services. Respondents, for example, spoke about underfunding in Early Years, funding pressures in schools 'driven in particular by the increased level of need of pupils requiring additional support, and inflationary pressures impacting payroll and maintenance costs' (City/district council respondent 1) as well as 'piecemeal and short-sighted

funding, for example for SEND outreach' (Schools and AP respondent 6). Some spoke about how tightening school budgets has led to cutbacks in the provision of breakfast and after school clubs, which were often a lifeline for children and families under financial pressure, providing spaces for their basic needs to be met and opportunities for children to engage in extracurricular activities.

4.5.7.3 Almost all respondents mentioned a lack of resources and capacity in the wider system as factors that may be contributing to some children in Oxfordshire finding it hard to succeed in school. Some spoke about reduced capacity for early intervention and universal family support due to the closure of Children's Centres and lack of Family Hubs. Others spoke about a lack of early diagnosis of needs as well as long waiting lists and high thresholds to access specialist support, including Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) and speech and language therapy. Taken together, these issues were seen to lead to reactive rather than proactive and preventative working, confusion over how, when and where to refer pupils for support, and 'some partner agencies and professionals stating [that] some of the need is not for them to address' (OCC respondent 6).

4.5.7.4 Additionally, there was a feeling amongst some of the school respondents that they were having to spend 'so much time filling the gaps in social care assessment and SEN in school' (Schools and AP respondent 13) that it was preventing them from focusing on outcomes for all pupils:

For example, we have spent so much time completing S+N [Strengths and Needs] assessments but we are still not accessing enough specialist support. Everything feels like it is being pushed back to schools without having any additional staff/time/finance/resources to manage this effectively. It feels that the paperwork and red tape is creating a barrier to actually putting supportive action in place. (Schools and AP respondent 13)

4.5.7.5 Respondents spoke of a SEND system under extreme pressure with an apparent lack of coherence in the local area SEND Strategy. Concerns were raised over the Education, Health and Care Needs Assessment (EHCNA) process and meeting EHCP requirements and timescales. A number of parents who responded to the call for evidence described their frustration over the LA's lack of response to formal complaints. They also attributed the high number of appeals received by the LA to a lack of partnership working with parents.

4.5.7.6 Some spoke about underfunding of SEND provision by the DfE in Oxfordshire and suggested that in some cases this may have resulted in school resources for supporting disadvantaged children being redirected to support children with SEND. Linked to issues of funding for SEND was a feeling amongst many that there is insufficient provision of special school places in Oxfordshire.

4.5.7.7 Infrastructure

A common comment made by respondents was that there are not enough special schools places in Oxfordshire, nor enough specialist support in schools or available to help schools when a special school place is unavailable. Parents spoke about difficulties in accessing provision without an EHCP and issues around provisions being named on EHCPs regardless of these provisions expressing that they will not

be able to meet need and evidence provided to show that the child will be unable to attend the placement. A lack of provision for children with SEMH needs has meant that in some cases children are being directed into alternative provision (AP), where spaces are also limited and expensive, and may not necessarily be the best fit to meet the child's needs. The stakeholder conversations illuminated what might be termed the special school conundrum, whereby on the one hand there was a call for more special schools and on the other hand a call for more inclusive mainstream school environments.

4.5.7.8 Some respondents also commented on the availability and suitability of AP in the county and the lack of strategic planning and overview. Some suggested that there is a need for more AP that is affordable and accessible from different areas of the county, or alternatively funding for schools to set up internal provisions and alternative pathways, including vocational courses. It was recognised that all AP must be of the highest quality and provide a meaningful education to the children and young people who access it, with all partners (e.g., LA, schools, alternative providers, partner agencies, parents/carers and young people) working together to plan and review the suitability of the placement and support on offer.

4.5.8 Unstable workforce

4.5.8.1 Issues of recruitment and retention across several sectors including education, social care and health were mentioned by a number of respondents. High turnover of staff, including senior leaders, and constant restructuring within the LA was described by one respondent as making it 'impossible to ever embed anything' (OCC respondent 1). Churn within the LA workforce, including at senior officer level, was seen to have affected the visibility and availability of LA staff and at times led to 'start again syndrome' (OCC respondent 9).

4.5.8.2 It was acknowledged that teacher recruitment and retention are national issues, however the cost of housing and wider cost of living in Oxfordshire, alongside transport issues and low traffic neighbourhoods (LTNs), were fuelling recruitment and retention issues in Oxfordshire. According to teacher vacancy data from the *School workforce in England* publication (DfE 2023b), the rate of teacher vacancies in Oxfordshire was higher than national in 2022/23, with the rate of vacant leadership positions being much higher (0.8% as opposed to 0.3%). There was a sense that difficulties in recruiting and retaining good teachers was felt most acutely in areas of disadvantage where the need for continuity and stability is greatest.

4.5.9 System expertise

4.5.9.1 Another issue mentioned by some respondents was an apparent lack of knowledge, understanding and awareness in some mainstream schools around SEND, including SEMH difficulties, and how to adapt education and the educational environment to meet the needs of young people. Drawing on their experience of working with young people in Oxfordshire, one respondent from the community and voluntary sector described how they believed the medical model of disability, rather than the social model of disability, continues to predominate in schools with responsibility for

supporting the needs of young people with SEND falling in many cases to the Special Educational Needs Coordinator (SENCO) and teaching assistants (TAs) rather than being seen as the responsibility of all. Levels of expertise, paired with capacity and resources, were understood to vary between schools leading to inconsistent and unequal provision. Lack of understanding and training around the impact that trauma can have on young people's development and lives was also mentioned by a number of respondents. Some of the children and young people spoken to mentioned how being in the wrong head space, or things happening at home, may make it hard for some young people to engage in learning and wanted teachers to be aware of, and understand, this: 'If you aren't in the right head space, you can't work' (Children in Care Council focus group).

4.5.9.2 Insufficient training around SEND and trauma were linked to late identification and an escalation of need, as well as misunderstandings around behaviour and an overfocus on sanctioning rather than unpicking the reasons behind behaviour.

4.5.9.3 As well as a lack of system expertise, others spoke about how opportunities to draw on existing system expertise were not always taken up and opportunities for collaboration had been missed. For example, sector expertise not being drawn upon in the development of recent unsuccessful funding bids for two new special schools.

4.5.10 Exclusionary school environments and practices

4.5.10.1 Several respondents, including children and young people, described the inflexibility of the mainstream school system and aspects of mainstream school environments that can make it hard for some students to succeed. Linked to the issue of system expertise, Schools and AP respondent 6 described the curriculum as 'not set up for need' and suggested that more support for teachers to enable access to the curriculum for all pupils would be beneficial. Others described how the narrow academic curriculum coupled with diminishing facilities outside of school had resulted in fewer and fewer opportunities for young people who may find traditional academic subjects difficult, to thrive. Respondents called for alternative and more tailored approaches based on the interests of the child, vocational options, and opportunities for children to develop themselves holistically, including learning basic life skills.

4.5.10.2 Some of the groups of children and young people described how limited choices in subject options meant that not everyone has the same chance to succeed and achieve their career aspirations. When asked what does not help children and young people to succeed, some students spoke both about unengaging and unchallenging lessons as well as issues with pacing, and limited time and explanations provided, in lessons.

4.5.10.3 'Structural ableism' as opposed to 'inclusion' was seen to be built into the DNA of mainstream school environments and cultures. As described by Community and voluntary sector respondent 1:

When I say structural ableism I mean that the school environment and curriculum is not fit for purpose because it has been designed by non-disabled and neuro-typical people for a diverse

range of learners - class sizes prevent young people without an EHCP from receiving the quality of attention and support to understand their strengths and areas of development.

4.5.10.4 Such neurotypical environments were identified as being overwhelming, inaccessible and at times exclusionary for some children and young people. Some of the children and young people spoken with described how distracting classroom environments can prevent some students from learning. Others spoke about how restricted access to spaces and facilities in schools led to frustration, for example not being allowed to go to the toilet during lessons or inside during breaktimes. Discussing access to food in schools, some also described how 'some kids might not be open about not having money [and] some might just go without' (Secondary school pupil focus group 3).

4.5.10.5 Other issues discussed by some children and young people as well as practitioners working in mental health were the impacts that both bullying and social isolation can have on children and young people's ability to get on at school and their sense of belonging. There is a strong link between mental health, and anxiety in particular, and the extent to which young people feel they do not belong. Where young people find themselves on the edge of society or social groups, they are less likely to attend school and less likely to engage and succeed even when they do.

4.5.10.6 A number of respondents, including children and young people, also described how points of transition, from nursery to primary school, primary to secondary, and secondary to post-16 can be a difficult experience for some young people, due to amongst other things the change in environment, and require careful consideration and planning.

4.5.10.7 Practices, described as oppressive and punitive, such as zero-tolerance behaviour policies, detentions, reintegration timetables, isolation and exclusion, were also mentioned by some stakeholders, including children and young people, as things that do not work and are not helping pupils to succeed. Linked to the lack of understanding of SEND and trauma discussed in the system expertise section, some children and young people described being punished for things outside of their control, and how misunderstanding of need can lead to conflict: '... teachers get angry if you do something you can't help, like fidgeting, or you might get told you're back chatting' (Secondary school pupil focus group 1).

4.5.10.8 The children and young people described both the need for behaviour policies to be applied consistently, but also fairly which may mean needing to be flexible and responsive to a child's needs and circumstances.

4.5.10.9 Linked to the discussion in the *defining success* section, stakeholders from the different groups spoken to, reflected on the impact that the inspection culture in England may be having on practice in schools. While regulation (which may involve inspection) is clearly important, some noted how target setting, current accountability pressures and over scrutiny can lead to box ticking, loss of creativity and a narrow focus on academic achievement. Pressure to perform was also mentioned by some of the children and young people spoken to as something that was not helping those who find it hardest to succeed.

4.5.11 Ambition and opportunities for some

4.5.11.1 Finally, under things that do not help, respondents talked about the impact of deficit views, discrimination and limited mindsets. In particular, some respondents felt that the level of ambition for some groups of children and young people was sometimes lower. For example, OCC respondent 10 described how ‘there is not enough rigour around academic attainment for CWCF’ and Parent 4 spoke about how ‘those with some of the greatest ‘disabilities’ often receive the least input or belief that success is possible.’ One young person described how she felt at times young people from particular backgrounds can be put into the ‘box of not succeeding’ (Children in Care Council focus group) and Schools and AP respondent 29 stated: ‘What is needed is real belief in the children of Oxfordshire.’

4.5.11.2 Taken together the themes described in the first part of Section 4 have shown an education landscape that provides opportunities for some but not opportunities for all.

4.5.11.3 While addressing some of the structural and systemic difficulties discussed is beyond the scope of any one county or school, in the following section we focus on things that can help and could be addressed locally.

4.6 Things that can help

4.6.1 Playing the same game not the blame game

4.6.1.1 Throughout our conversations with professionals, parents, and practitioners there was an enduring sense for the need to play the same game not the blame game, and commitment from stakeholders to work together as ‘we are all on the same side’ (Schools and AP respondent 1). In order to play the same game, respondents spoke about the need for an agreed shared vision that is implemented through working in partnership across services, settings, communities, families and children. It was felt that clarifying and clearly communicating the roles of different players and the rules of the game, for example, knowing how, when and why to contact different services and agencies, and ensuring a shared understanding of what is possible, reasonable and achievable, and what is not, may help to foster more coordinated and joined-up working and problem-solving. Others spoke of the need for a common language between services as well as shared responsibility and clear accountability. Respondents also identified children and young people and their parents/carers as key players and described the need for genuine co-production, and a listening culture, involving all partners including parents/carers and children and young people.

4.6.1.2 To build trust and avoid allocation of blame, respondents described the importance of (1) respectful challenge, (2) acknowledging and learning from things that do not work and when mistakes are made, as well as (3) communicating honestly and fairly, even about difficult issues, and (4) taking a strengths-based approach.

4.6.2 Taking a strengths and needs based approach

4.6.2.1 Taking a strengths-based approach and actively identifying, publicising, sharing and building on the strengths of partners, and what is done or working well, may lead to changes in perception and help to promote a more collaborative local culture. Drawing on strengths can help organisations and partners to confidently tackle gaps and weaknesses, in the understanding that all are valued, and behaviour change is possible.

4.6.2.2 The analysis and use of data can help to identify underlying strengths and needs and inform how services develop individually and collectively to work with strengths and address needs at the community level. It can then be used to monitor progress and change. As one respondent said: 'If we can get a clear understanding of need we can respond in ways that are smarter and move towards more joined-up working' (OCC respondent 6).

4.6.2.3 Some respondents spoke about how community and third sector organisations are a strength that are not always recognised or used consistently and effectively. They encouraged greater recognition of their contribution in supporting partnership work at the individual, family and community level. Some noted how locating appointments with health and other services within the school and community can work well, for example using physical resources such as former Children's Centres, community centres and schools to avoid the need for costly transport and lost time from school for children.

4.6.2.4 In relation to individual children, some respondents noted how the strengths and needs based approach to early help – identifying the support needed including through home visiting – is helping to address attendance and attainment needs. This approach could be extended beyond schools to all agencies working with those children and families being willing to work in partnership to determine how to achieve sustainable improvement in outcomes.

4.6.3 Building coherent capacity

4.6.3.1 Members of the commission and respondents acknowledged the potential of the recently agreed strategies for Early Help and SEND as well as the Practice Framework. Further scrutiny of the SEND strategy was suggested in order to build a clearer implementation plan. Respondents and members of the Commission also described the need to consider contradictory messages and practices when implementing multiple new strategies, in order to avoid unintended consequences. The challenge will be for local stakeholders to identify synergies between the implementation plan of the SEND strategy and the action plan based on the proposals of the OEC, and to align these plans to help all children and young people to succeed.

4.6.3.2 Many respondents noted the importance of building professional knowledge about tackling needs arising from SEND and trauma, including in initial training and school leadership, so that school leaders set a culture of collective responsibility and all staff are confident in their practice knowing they can draw on and work with specialist input when necessary.

4.6.4 Inclusive cultures – Everyone belongs

4.6.4.1 Many respondents talked about the need for whole school culture change to be more aware of those most disadvantaged children and their needs including ‘knowledge about what can be barriers, a baseline of thinking about behaviour as communication so that when young people behave in challenging ways the first thought is “what is the need here?”’ (Community and voluntary sector respondent 5). Part of that culture change relates to ensuring that school environments foster emotional safety and that every child feels they belong and that their voices are heard, since we know that having a sense of belonging is central to enabling young people to succeed at school. As School and AP respondent 1 noted: ‘If a child does not feel safe at school, they will not be able to learn.’

4.6.4.2 Examples given by parents of strategies that can support individual needs include:

- Relationship based support so that the individual needs of a child can be met
- Staff to be available to support issues as they arise e.g., transition from break time
- Teachers that respond to need e.g., brain breaks, extra breaks
- Developing positive relationships with parents and carers
- Supporting staff e.g., TAs who want to develop their practice to support needs they see
- ‘Kindness, support, understanding and an alternative education where they can learn without feeling lacking and different, or left in a corridor’ (Parent 3)

- Thinking outside the box – creative learning such as access to alternative curriculum opportunities (not just academic)
- Catch up academic support after school hours (Parent 6)

4.6.4.3 However, the challenge becomes ‘how’ when capacity, especially in smaller schools or with small numbers of children, is limited. This highlights a need for school to school, community and service partnerships and collaboration where all schools in a local area work collectively to meet needs.

4.6.5 Listening to the voice of the child

4.6.5.1 The importance of listening to the voice of the child and consulting children and young people on all issues that affect them was emphasised by many different stakeholder groups, including a primary school pupil focus group who clearly stated: ‘LISTEN to what children are really saying’. This message was also emphasised in a report shared with the Commission which spotlighted good practice in Oxfordshire for service children. In the report, a pupils’ ambassador group stated that schools must create opportunities to actively listen and respond to children and young people (RAF Families Federation 2022).

4.6.5.2 When discussing what helps children and young people in schools, children in the primary school focus groups also talked about teachers being actively involved with them and providing

academic and emotional support, including providing examples and explanations, teaching them ‘step by step’ (Primary school pupil focus group 11) and helping them with the step they are stuck on.

4.6.5.3. Pupils across the primary and secondary school focus groups mentioned engaging, active, creative and ‘fun lessons’ (Primary school pupil focus group 7) and teaching methods as helping children and young people to achieve, as well as positive and trusting relationships with teachers and peers. They also spoke about the importance of safe and calm learning environments, and teachers who encourage them, adapt to their needs and ‘tailor support for each young person’ (Children in Care Council focus group), understand their behaviour, build on their strengths, and reward them. The children and young people also spoke about the importance of being in the right head space to learn and having ‘good thoughts to start’ (Primary school pupil focus group 6). Others talked about ensuring every child has a trusted adult they can speak to about any problems or concerns. Pupils also described how all children should have the same opportunities and talked about the importance of extracurricular activities. They also mentioned enjoying being able to take on positions of responsibility through for example school councils.

4.6.5.4 Pupils in the secondary school focus groups also mentioned the importance of receiving support for SEND and mental health difficulties – ‘I had anxiety at school and nobody knew if the support people could help’ (Secondary school pupil focus group 3) – as well as preparing young people for life after school and helping them to achieve their ambitions. For example, Secondary school pupil focus group 3 spoke about the importance of work experience saying: ‘not everyone has connections to people at work. For the ones that I have thought about I don’t know anyone’.

4.6.6 Family and community working

4.6.6.1 Many respondents talked about the importance of building links with parents and communities. These links need to involve all partners including schools, social care, health and third sector partners. Respondents provided suggestions of things they felt worked well including home school link workers, and other link workers who can ensure that schools and families are aware of community support and ‘offer locality networks and resources... to ensure children and families are well supported at the earliest stages when emerging need is identified’ (OCC respondent 6).

4.6.6.2 Respondents also noted many community links that already exist and are having an impact, that could be further built on. For example, Community and voluntary sector respondent 1 mentioned:

- school holiday clubs which offer structured provision which can help maintain a focus on education, and provide structured outcomes which keep children engaged, and mean that pupils are better able to start back at school
- ‘... positive activities facilitated by positive role models from within the communities’
- ‘food poverty being identified quickly and addressed by schools signposting families to local food banks’
- ‘therapeutic creative sessions for children struggling to engage... [and] bespoke sessions for the parents of these children, and to teachers to support with resilience and wellbeing’
- ‘... schools who prioritise building links to local voluntary sector providers who deliver in house projects for young people’ such as youth work programmes

- building ‘personal leadership skills with young people struggling to achieve in mainstream education.’

4.6.7 Early intervention

4.6.7.1 Many respondents from across all the groups referred to the need to take a more preventative, early intervention approach to enabling better outcomes, not only for those children who find it hardest to succeed but for all children and their families. The economic as well as human arguments for shifting the balance in approach are compelling. It was noted that we need ‘effective multi-agency Early Help within the community that identifies children and their families at the earliest stage when children are observed/assessed to have difficulties in reaching their potential, and not making sufficient progress in their developmental milestones and educational attainment’ (OCC respondent 5). Respondents described both the need to reinstate previous provisions such as family centres as well as the ‘need to begin to think differently’ (Statutory Partner 3). For example, Statutory partners respondent 3 talked about ‘providing a joint single point of access between agencies – Education, CAMHs, social care – [and] treating the child as a whole.’ This links back to earlier discussions around the need to draw together different data in order to take a more holistic approach.

4.6.8 Long-term vision and investment to deliver impact

4.6.8.1 Linked to early intervention, and in line with the call for a shared strategic vision, respondents spoke about the need to avoid short-termism, and ‘silver bullets’ (Schools and AP respondent 6) and focus on long-term investment to deliver impact. All of the data presented so far in this report has shown that we are not dealing with straightforward short-term problems that can be addressed with short-term solutions. Rather, the challenge at hand is complex and will require an overarching strategy and joint action from all stakeholders.

4.6.9 Making Oxfordshire an attractive place to work

4.6.9.1 Respondents spoke about needing to make Oxfordshire an attractive place to work in order to diversify the workforce and address staff turnover and staff vacancies. Many spoke about the need to resolve housing and transport issues. City/district council respondent 1 noted that they are working with partners who own land to see if more key worker housing can be delivered and with OCC and local bus companies ‘to tackle the issue of congestion and boost the speed of bus travel and provision of bus routes into the city.’ The OEC welcomes these developments.

4.6.10 Opportunities for all

4.6.10.1 Overall, respondents expressed a commitment to improving educational opportunities for all children and young people in Oxfordshire and called for tenacious practitioners with high expectations and ambition for all to ‘[do their] bit in this big thing’ (Schools and AP respondent 28).

5. Call to Action

5.1 Introduction

‘We need to stop just talking and focus on doing’ (Headteacher 1)

5.1.1 The intent of the following proposals, which are in line with the OEC terms of reference, is that they are ‘valuable for all, vital for some’ and that they provide levers for change. They are primarily intended to deliver on the recommendations to the OEC from the voices of Oxfordshire’s children and young people (summarised as):

- Help children who find things difficult; not everyone learns in the same way
- Let children be good at something in their own way
- Be ambitious for every child; do not put children in boxes
- Foster a sense of belonging for every child

5.1.2 In the Table below, the Commission has provided proposals for the Council to consider with suggested accountabilities.

Data	
<i>Proposal</i>	<i>Suggested accountability</i>
1. The Council, with the CEF directorate, should prioritise the rigorous and consistent analysis of its extensive educational and other relevant data; sharing it transparently and in a timely manner with all parties (schools, councillors, key partners, the wider public) to collectively determine priorities and action.	○ OCC SLT (notably the DCS and Director of Public Health; DPH)
2. The Council should use its statutory arrangements to monitor the data and the impact of the agreed actions at least annually.	○ OCC SLT (notably the DCS and DPH)
Role of local government and other stakeholders	
<i>Proposal</i>	<i>Suggested accountability</i>
3. The Council should ensure that statutory arrangements effectively fulfil their responsibility for oversight of educational outcomes for all children and young people, especially the most disadvantaged and vulnerable namely: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. People Overview and Scrutiny Committee b. Corporate Parenting Committee 	○ Full Council / Cabinet

c. Children’s Trust (linked to Health and Wellbeing Board) d. Schools Forum	
4. The Council’s Senior Leadership Team should collectively and by directorate demonstrate through their actions, that educational outcomes as well as safeguarding are ‘everyone’s business.’	○ OCC SLT
5. The Council with its strategic partners should establish a Pan-Oxfordshire initiative to make Oxfordshire an attractive and supportive place to work in order to recruit and retain teachers and other hard to recruit and retain professionals, e.g., educational psychologists, social workers.	○ OCC and District / City Councils and other key partners
6. The Council should review, strengthen and expand links with and direct work from both the University of Oxford and Oxford Brookes University to ensure equity of access to class based, whole school and other learning initiatives in all Oxfordshire schools.	○ OCC SLT
7. OCC with business partners should seek to increase mutually beneficial opportunities such as supported internships, work experience and employee volunteering in schools.	○ OCC with Oxfordshire Inclusive Economy Partnership
Future direction	
<i>Proposal</i>	<i>Suggested accountability</i>
8. The Local Authority, working collaboratively with all partners, should develop at pace an overarching vision to be underpinned by coherent strategies and plans.	○ OCC with partners
9. The CEF Directorate should lead the building of coherence between the recently agreed strategies for Early Help and SEND and the Practice Framework through linked/aligned implementation plans for multi-agency working to achieve their stated ambition for every child in Oxfordshire to thrive/flourish.	○ DCS and CEF Deputy Directors with partner representatives
10. The CEF Directorate should continue its move away from siloed service management to an approach where collaboration and integrated working across all of CEF / Children’s Services led by the Director for Children’s	○ CEF DLT / wider DLT

Services are routine and recognised as in the best interests of every child as well as more efficient.	
11. A rapid review should be undertaken in the Autumn term of the partnership (meeting) arrangements between school leaders ⁴ and the local authority to drive implementation of the OEC proposals and other agreed priorities through mutually challenging yet respectful ways of working.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Schools / education setting leaders and senior LA officers
12. The LA and schools should develop stronger processes to hold each other to account for regular contact at a senior level irrespective of school governance structures.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ LA senior officers and Trust / Diocese / School leaders
13. The DCS should lead on developing coherent communication (written/oral/meetings/in person visits) between the LA and all schools based on appropriate frequency and relevance to agreed priorities and actions.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ DCS and CEF DLT with representative primary / secondary / special school headteacher groups
14. All schools should play a part in developing communities of inclusive schools serving all Oxfordshire's children through contributing to innovation and evaluation of effective inclusion practice in local areas.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ All schools / education settings
15. The Teaching School Hub should work with senior CEF officers to build on existing school to school support, drawing on school-based expertise, for county wide improvement work.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Teaching School Hub and LA senior CEF officers with all school leaders
16. The local authority with Schools Forum should re-establish clarity around responsibilities and accountabilities within the shared parameters of the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) and Council budgets for schools and Children's Services, ensuring these are effectively communicated and reviewed.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ S151 Officer, DCS and Schools Forum
17. All partners in the Local Area Partnership (LAP) should invest jointly in real and effective co-production with parents.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Children's Trust and School Trusts / Governing Boards

⁴ The term school leaders should be taken to include school governing boards.

5.2 Action plan

5.2.1 It is for OCC and its partners to develop a locally relevant action plan with clear timescales, impact measures and an investment plan to deliver any of the proposals above.

5.2.2 The Commission found a real commitment from stakeholders and partners to work together to impact positively on the achievements of Oxfordshire's children and young people. An initial focus in the action plan on 'next steps' to reset core ways of working should be followed at pace by 'best steps' to achieve the shared ambition for all children as in their words 'step by step' (Primary school pupil focus group 11).

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Appendix A: Acronyms

ACEs: Adverse Childhood Experiences

AP: Alternative Provision

CAMHS: Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services

CEF: Children, Education and Families

CME: Children Missing Education

CPD: Continuing Professional Development

CWCF: Children We Care For

DCS: Director of Children's Services

DfE: Department for Education

DLT: Directorate Leadership Team

DPH: Director of Public Health

DSG: Dedicated Schools Grant

EAL: English as an Additional Language

EHCNA: Education, Health and Care Needs Assessment

EHCP: Education, Health and Care Plan

EYFS: Early Years Foundation Stage

EYFSP: Early Years Foundation Stage Profile

FSM: Free School Meals

JSNA: Joint Strategic Needs Assessment

KS1: Key Stage 1

KS2: Key Stage 2

KS4: Key Stage 4

LA: Local Authority

LAP: Local Area Partnership

LTN: Low Traffic Neighbourhoods

OCC: Oxfordshire County Council

OEC: Oxfordshire Education Commission

RWM: Reading, Writing and Mathematics

SEMH: Social Emotional and Mental Health

SENCO: Special Educational Needs Coordinator

SEND: Special Educational Needs and Disabilities

SLT: Senior Leadership Team

TAF: Team Around the Family

TAs: Teaching Assistants

Appendix B: Educational Outcomes for Pupils in Oxfordshire (2021/22)

Introduction

In this appendix a detailed description of the educational outcomes data presented in Section 2 is provided, including further comparisons with statistical neighbours.

Outcomes for all pupils

Early Years Foundation Stage Profile (EYFSP)

Focusing on data from 2022 for all pupils in Oxfordshire, at the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS), Oxfordshire ranked in the top quartile nationally when compared with all other Local Authorities (LAs) and 4th out of 11 statistical neighbours⁵, with 68 per cent of children achieving a good level of development. This is 3 percentage points above the national result. The gap between boys and girls in Oxfordshire is 12 percentage points. This is in-line with the national gap and narrower (better) than the regional and statistical neighbour gaps (13 and 14%pts respectively).

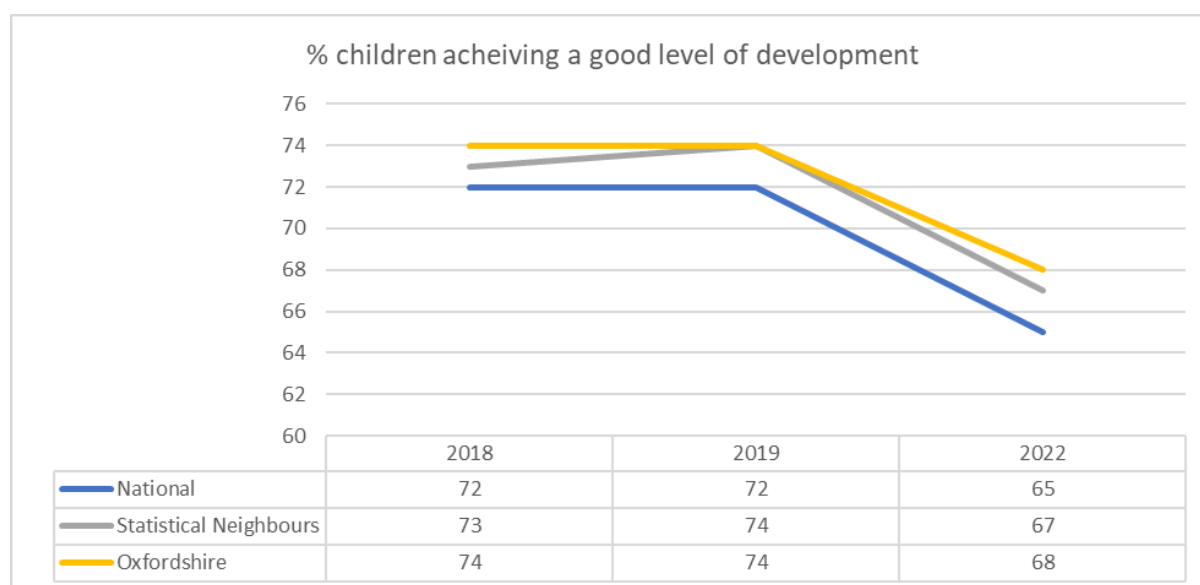


Figure 1: Percentage of children achieving a good level of development in 2022 in Oxfordshire compared to national and statistical neighbour averages

While Figure 1 indicates that the percentage of children achieving a good level of development has declined since 2018, it is important to note that as part of the EYFS reforms introduced in September 2021, the EYFS profile was significantly revised. It is therefore not possible to directly compare 2022

⁵ Oxfordshire's statistical neighbours are: Bath & N.E. Somerset, Bracknell Forest, Buckinghamshire, Cambridgeshire, Gloucestershire, Hampshire, Hertfordshire, West Berkshire, West Sussex, and Wiltshire.

assessment outcomes with earlier years. It is also the first release since the publication of the 2019 statistics, as the 2020 and 2021 data collections were cancelled due to the coronavirus (COVID-19).

Key Stage 1

At Key Stage 1, Oxfordshire again ranked in the top quartile nationally when compared with all other LAs and 4th out of statistical neighbours for the percentage of pupils achieving at least the expected standard in reading (69%; 2%pts above the national average). Oxfordshire also ranked in the 2nd quartile for the percentage of pupils achieving at least the expected average in mathematics (69%; 1%pt above the national average), and 4th out of statistical neighbours. However, for writing, 57 per cent of pupils achieved at least the expected standard in 2022, which is one percentage point below the national average placing Oxfordshire in the 3rd quartile nationally and joint 6th out of statistical neighbours (see Table 1).

Table 1: Percentage of pupils achieving at least the expected standard in reading, writing, mathematics and reading writing and mathematics (RWM) combined at Key Stage 1 in Oxfordshire compared to national, South East and statistical neighbour averages

Area	Cohort	% Achieving at least the expected standard			
		Reading	Writing	Mathematics	RWM*
National	-	67	58	68	53
South East	-	68	58	68	54
Statistical Neighbours	-	69	58	68	-
Oxfordshire	7585	69	57	69	53

Figure 2 shows that between 2017 and 2019 the percentage of pupils achieving at least the expected standard in reading, writing, mathematics and the combined RWM score generally increased (aside from mathematics where the score fluctuated), but then declined between 2019 and 2022.

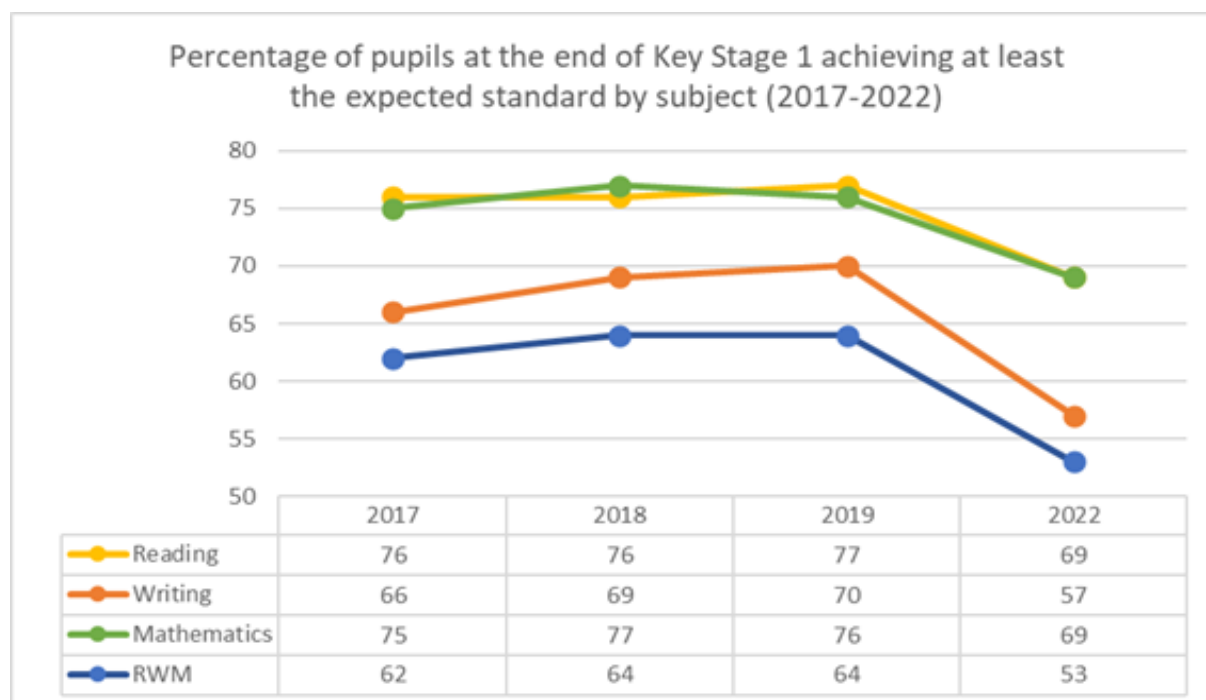


Figure 2: Percentage of pupils at the end of Key Stage 1 achieving at least the expected standard by subject (2017-2022)

Phonics Year 1 and Year 2

The percentage of Oxfordshire pupils working at the expected level in Year 1 phonics has also declined since 2018 (see Figure 3) and is one percentage point below the national average at 74 per cent, placing Oxfordshire in the 3rd quartile nationally when compared to all other LAs and 8th out of statistical neighbours.

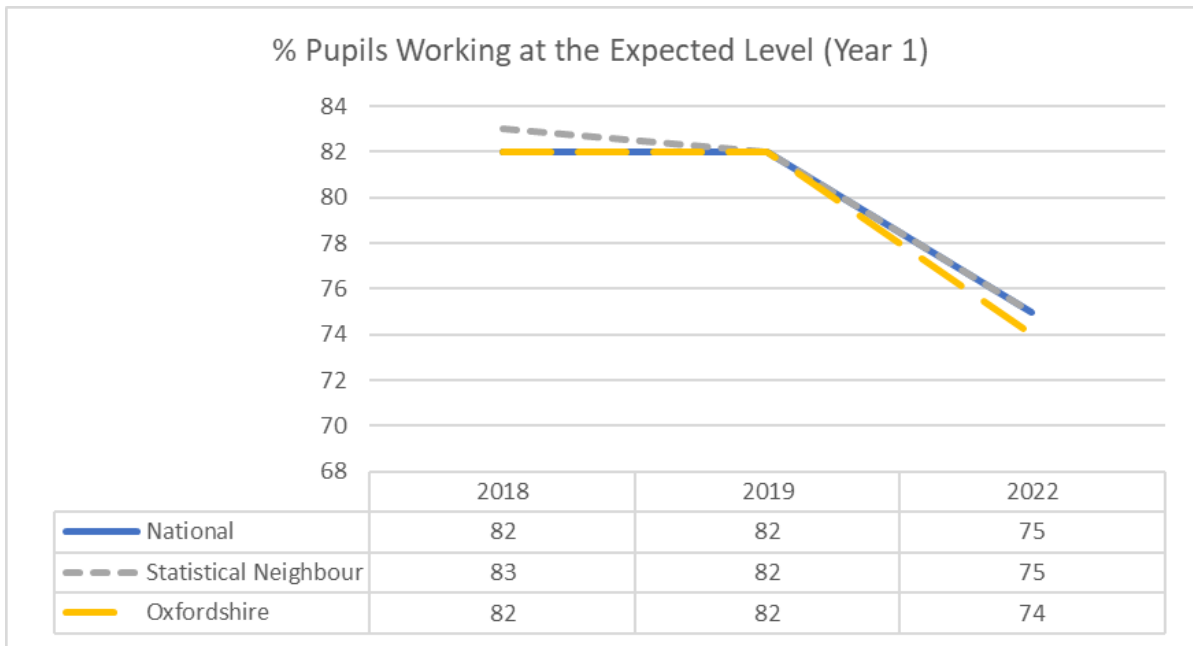


Figure 3: Percentage of pupils working at the expected level in phonics in Year 1 in 2022 in Oxfordshire compared to national and statistical neighbour averages

However, by the end of Year 2, the percentage of Oxfordshire pupils working at the expected level in phonics in 2022 was one percentage point above the national average at 88 per cent (though again Figure 4 depicts a slight decline since 2018). This places Oxfordshire in the 2nd quartile nationally and joint 1st out of statistical neighbours.

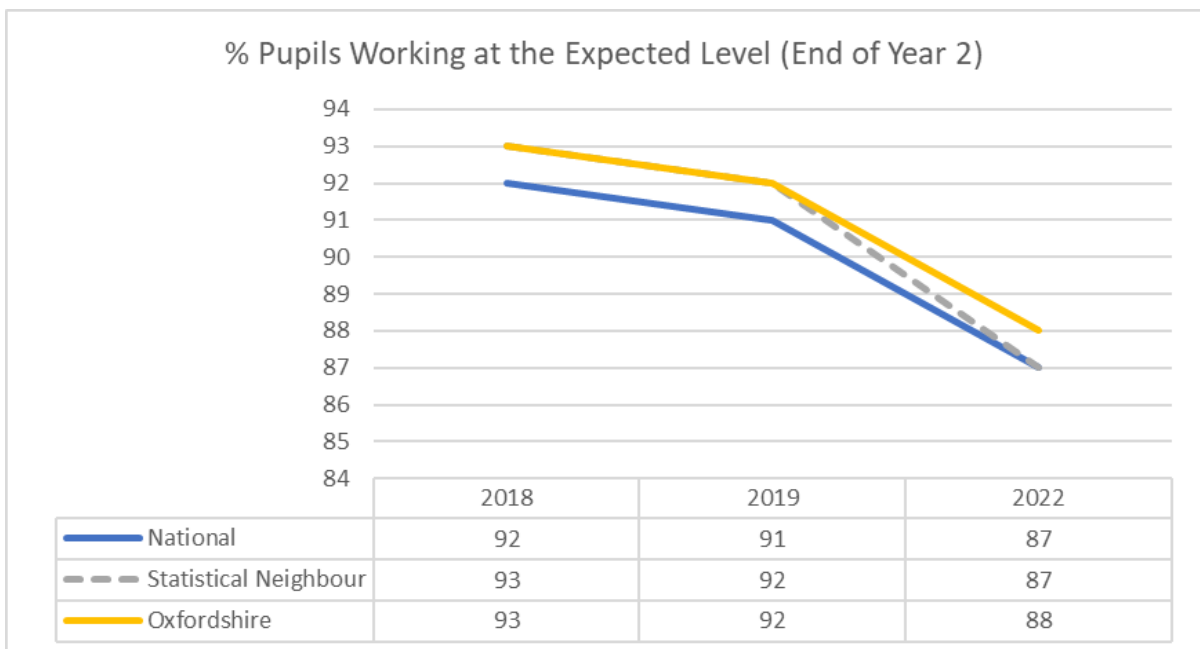


Figure 4: Percentage of pupils working at the expected level in phonics at the end of Year 2 in 2022 in Oxfordshire compared to national and statistical neighbour averages

Key Stage 2

At Key Stage 2, while the percentage of pupils achieving at least the expected standard in reading was in-line with the national average (75%), Table 2 shows that Oxfordshire was one percentage point below the national average for writing (69%), mathematics (71%) and RWM combined (58%). This places Oxfordshire in the 3rd quartile nationally for the RWM combined measure and joint 6th out of statistical neighbours (up from 3rd in 2018). Eight per cent of pupils in Oxfordshire reached the higher standard in RWM combined in 2022. This is the first time since 2017 that Oxfordshire has been above the national average for this measure.

Table 2: Percentage achieving at least the expected standard in reading, writing, mathematics, and RWM combined at KS2

School	Cohort	% Achieving at least the expected standard			
		Reading	Writing	Maths	RWM
National	-	75	70	72	59
South East	-	76	70	72	59
Statistical Neighbours	-	76	69	72	58
Oxfordshire	7,873	75	69	71	58

Aside from reading where the percentage of pupils achieving at least the expected standard increased, the percentage of pupils achieving at least the expected standard in writing, mathematics, and RWM combined declined between 2019 and 2022 (see Figure 5 for trends over time).

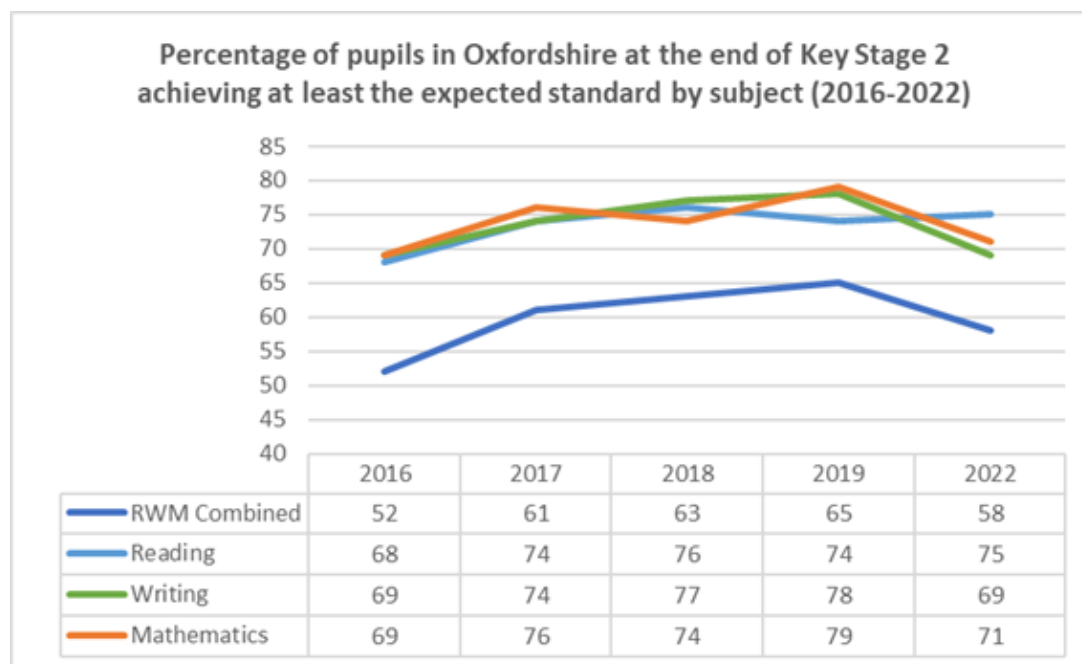


Figure 5: Percentage of pupils in Oxfordshire achieving at least the expected standard in reading, writing, mathematics and RWM at the end of Key Stage 2 (2016-2022)

Key Stage 4

In 2022, Oxfordshire's Attainment 8 score and the percentage of pupils achieving a grade 5 or above in both English and mathematics were both above the national average, with Oxfordshire ranking in the 2nd quartile nationally and 7th out of statistical neighbours (up from 2nd lowest in 2018 for Attainment 8 average score). However, between 2021 and 2022, Oxfordshire's Attainment 8 score reduced from 51.0 to 49.7 and the percentage of pupils achieving a grade 5 or above in English and mathematics reduced by 1.1 percentage points from 54 per cent in 2021 to 52.9 per cent in 2022 (see Table 3 and Figures 6 and 7).

Table 3: Attainment 8 and GCSE English and mathematics grades 5-9 (%) in 2022 in Oxfordshire compared to 2021, national and statistical neighbour averages

Headlines	Oxfordshire	Statistical Neighbours	South East	National
Attainment 8 – average score per pupil	49.7	51.5	50.1	48.9
Compared to 2021	51.0	53.6	52.1	50.9
National Rank (quartile and rank out of 150)	2 nd (Jt 50 th) ←	-	-	-
SN Rank (out of 11)	7 th ↑	-	-	-
GCSE English & maths grades 5-9 (%)	52.9	53.1	52.1	50.0
Compared to 2021	54.0	56.9	52.4	51.9
National Rank (quartile)	2 nd (Jt 43 rd) ←	-	-	-
SN Rank (out of 11)	7 th ↑	-	-	-

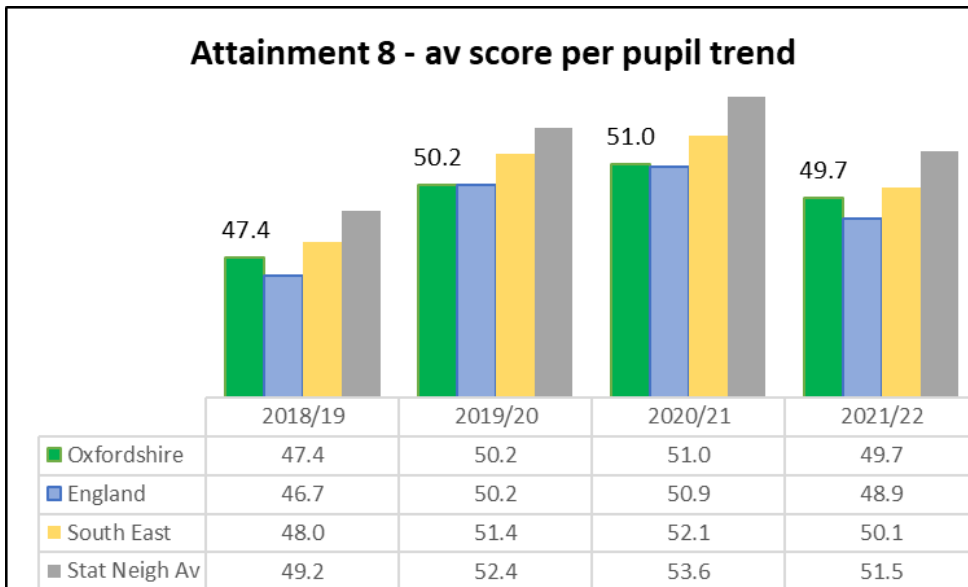


Figure 6: Trends in Attainment 8 average score in Oxfordshire compared to national, South East and statistical neighbour averages (2018/19-2021/22)

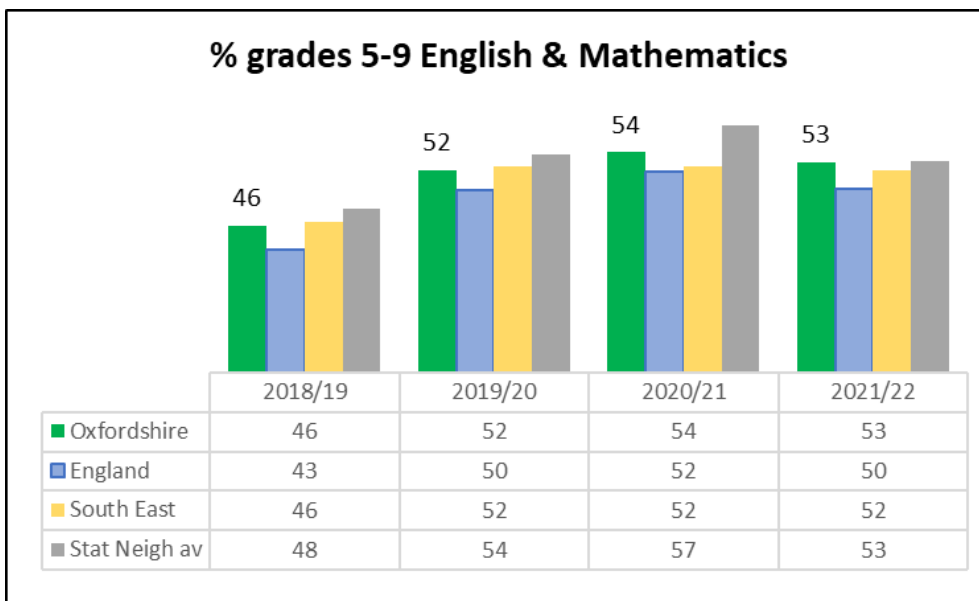


Figure 7: Trends in percentage of grades 5-9 English and mathematics in Oxfordshire compared to national, South East and statistical neighbour averages (2018/19-2021/22)

Boys, pupils whose first language is English, non-Free School Meals (FSM) pupils, girls, boys, non-disadvantage pupils and pupils with no Special Educational Needs (SEN) are the characteristic groups where the average Attainment 8 score in Oxfordshire is above the corresponding national average. Oxfordshire ranks in the top quartile of LAs for attainment at grade 5 and above in English and mathematics for pupils with no SEN (61.3%).

Key Stage 5

Finally, at Key Stage 5, while A level Average Point Score (APS) per entry reduced to 38.60 (-2.12 points) in 2022, this was less than the reduction seen nationally (-2.60 points), with Oxfordshire scoring above the national average by 0.74 points. This ranks Oxfordshire 48th out of all LAs for this measure, the 2nd quartile nationally and 7th out of statistical neighbours (see Figure 8).

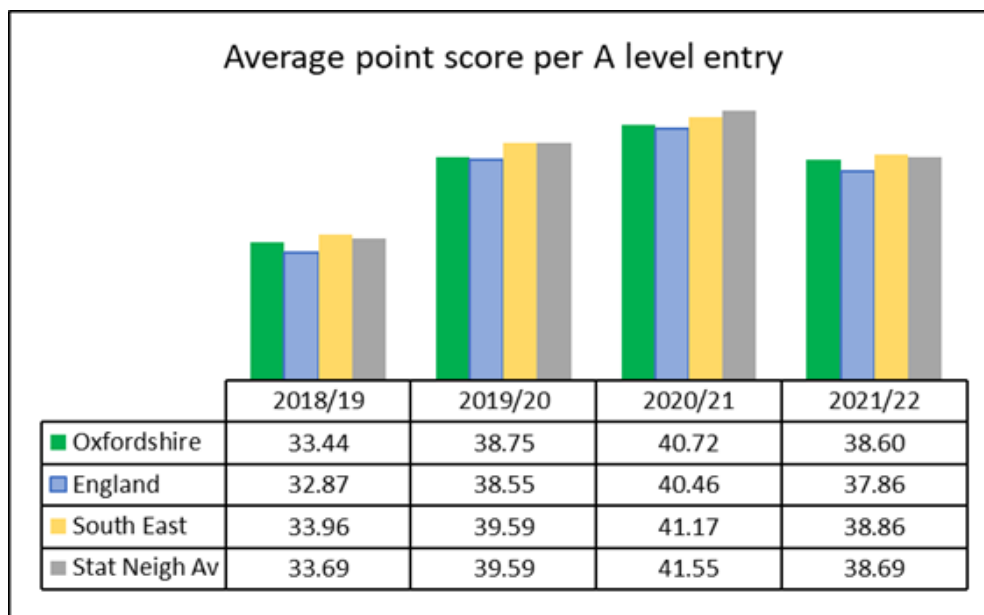


Figure 8: Average point score per A level entry in Oxfordshire compared to national, South East and statistical neighbour averages (2018/19-2021/22)

Moreover, 93.3 per cent of students in Oxfordshire achieved at least 2 A levels in 2022 which was higher than the national average of 87.5 per cent. This ranks Oxfordshire 25th out of 153 LAs, placing the County in the top quartile nationally, and 1st out of 11 statistical neighbours for this measure (See Figure 9).

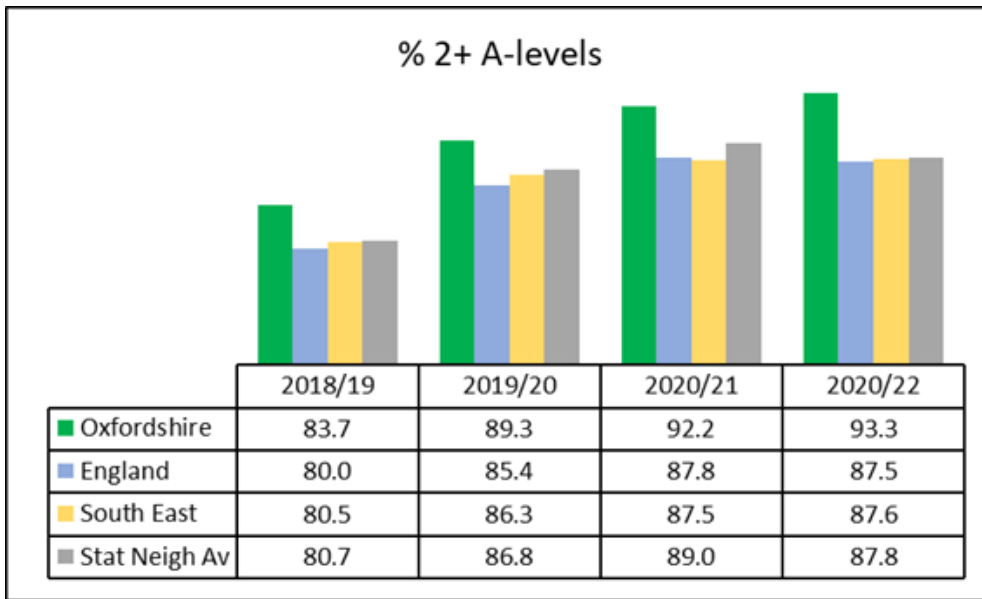


Figure 9: Percentage of pupils achieving at least two A levels in 2022 in Oxfordshire compared to national, South East and statistical neighbour averages

32.1 per cent of pupils in Oxfordshire achieved A-levels at grades AAB and better, compared with 31.4 per cent nationally, ranking Oxfordshire in the 2nd quartile nationally and 7th out of 11 statistical neighbours for this measure (see Figure 10). While the percentage of pupils achieving at least 3 A*A grades at A level in Oxfordshire is above the national average (20.3%), in 2022 the percentage decreased from 26.5 per cent in 2021 to 20.9 per cent. Oxfordshire ranks 6th out of 11 statistical neighbours for this measure and is placed in the 2nd quartile nationally (see Figure 11). A summary of A level results for 2022 in Oxfordshire can be found in Table 4.

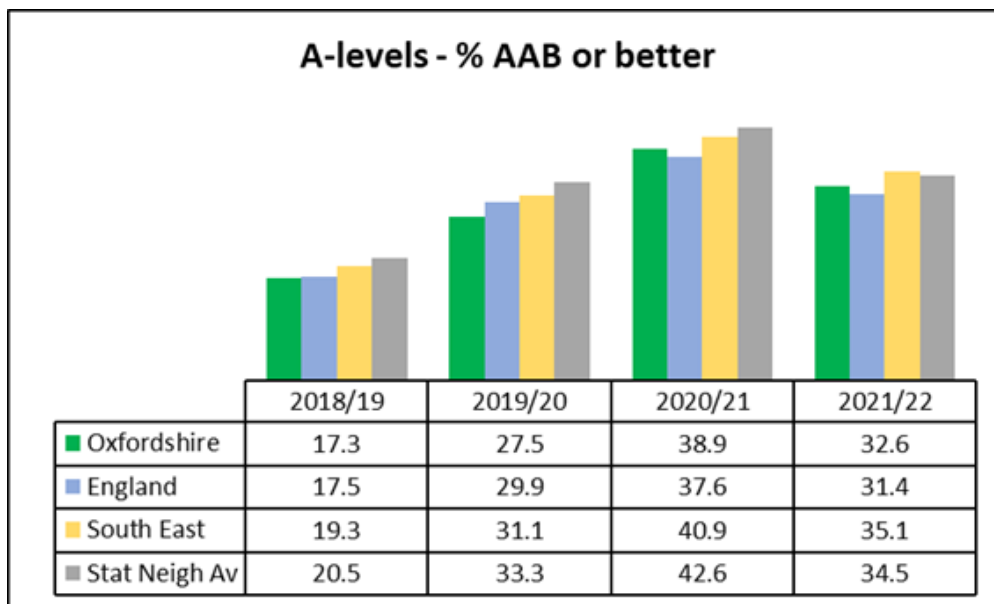


Figure 10: Percentage of pupils achieving grades AAB or better at A level in 2022 in Oxfordshire compared to national, South East and statistical neighbour averages (2018/19-2021/22)

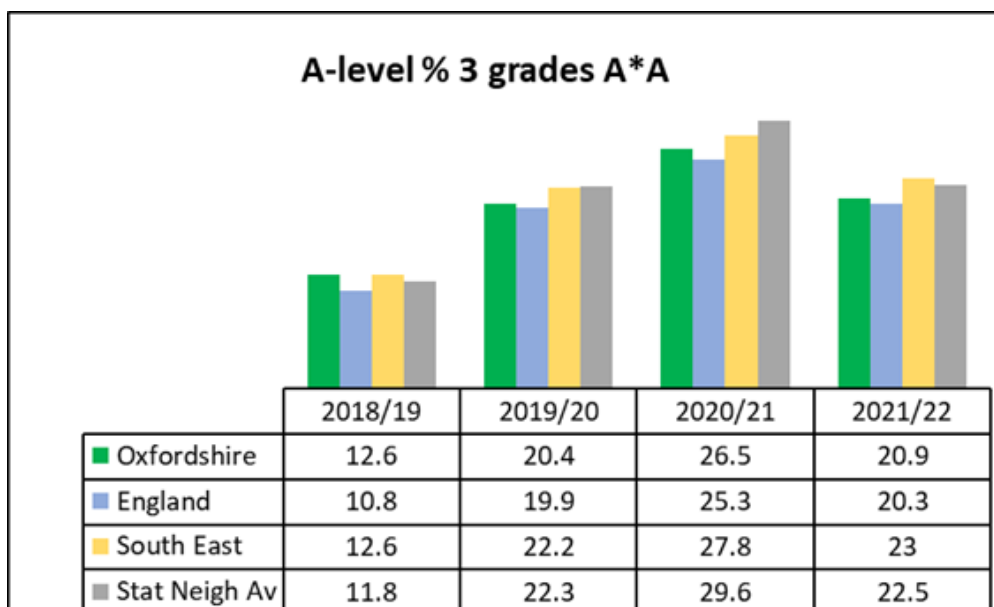


Figure 11: Percentage of pupils achieving grades A*A or better at A level in 2022 in Oxfordshire compared to national, South East and statistical neighbour averages (2018/19-2021/22)

Table 4: Summary of A level results in Oxfordshire in 2022 compared with national, South East and statistical neighbour averages

Headlines	Oxfordshire	Statistical Neighbours	South East	National
Average point score – A levels	38.60	38.69	38.86	37.86
Compared to 2021	40.72	41.55	41.17	40.46
National Rank (quartile)	2 nd (48 th) ↑	-	-	-
SN Rank (out of 11)	7 th ↑	-	-	-
2+ A levels (%)	93.3%	87.8%	87.6%	87.5%
Compared to 2021	92.2%	89.0%	87.5%	87.8%
National Rank (quartile)	1 st (25 th) ←	-	-	-
SN Rank (out of 11)	1 st ↑	-	-	-
A levels: AAB and above (%)	32.6%	34.5%	35.1%	31.4%
Compared to 2021	38.9%	42.6%	40.9%	37.6%
National rank (quartile)	2 nd (51 st) ←	-	-	-
SN Rank (out of 11)	7 th ↑	-	-	-
A levels: 3A*A (%)	20.9%	22.5%	23.1%	20.3%
Compared to 2021	26.5%	29.6%	27.8%	25.3%
National rank (quartile)	2 nd (48 th) ←	-	-	-
SN Rank (out of 11)	6 th ↑	-	-	-

In comparison to A level results, the Applied General APS per entry decreased to 30.45 in 2022 (from 33.09 in 2021). This decrease (-2.64 points) was greater than the reduction seen nationally (-1.53 points) and Oxfordshire scores lower than the national average (by -1.46 points). Oxfordshire is placed in the bottom quartile nationally. Only 11 LAs recorded a lower Applied General APS. Oxfordshire is also bottom out of 11 statistical neighbours (see Table 5 and Figure 12).

Table 5: Applied General APS results in Oxfordshire in 2022 compared with national, South East and statistical neighbour averages

Headlines	Oxfordshire	Statistical Neighbours	South East	National
Average point score – Applied General	30.45	33.09	32.22	31.91
Compared to 2021	33.09	33.86	33.06	32.63
National rank (quartile)	4 th (137 th) ↓	-	-	-
SN Rank (out of 11)	11 th ←	-	-	-

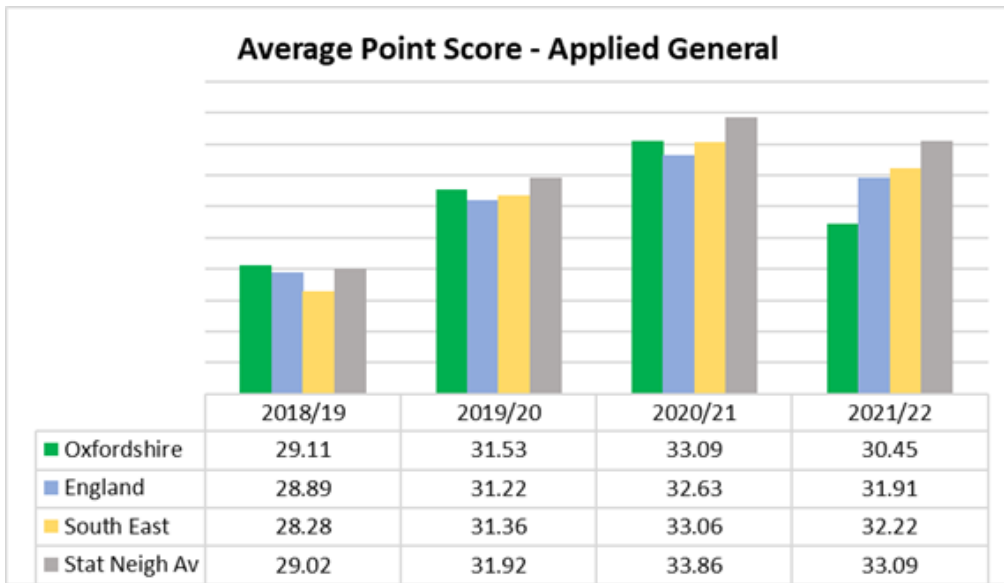


Figure 12: Applied General APS results in Oxfordshire compared with national, South East and statistical neighbour averages (2018/19-2021/22).

Locality differences

Locality differences were seen across all key stages as depicted in the following locality by key stage graphs.

EYFSP

The percentage of pupils achieving a good level of development in the EYFSP ranged from 62 per cent in the Thame locality to 75 per cent in the Woodstock locality in 2022. Four localities scored below the statistical neighbour average (see Figure 13).

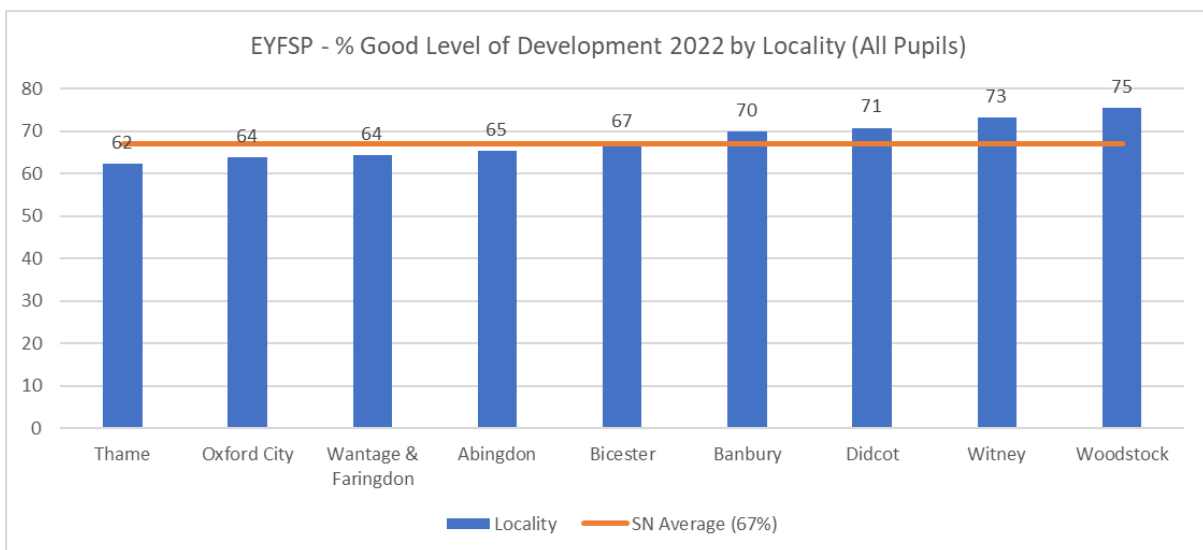


Figure 13: Percentage of pupils achieving a good level of development in the EYFSP by locality in 2022

Key Stage 1

At Key Stage 1, the percentage of pupils working at the expected standard in reading ranged from 64 per cent in the Witney locality to 74 per cent in the Woodstock locality in 2022, and four localities were below the statistical neighbour average (see Figure 14).

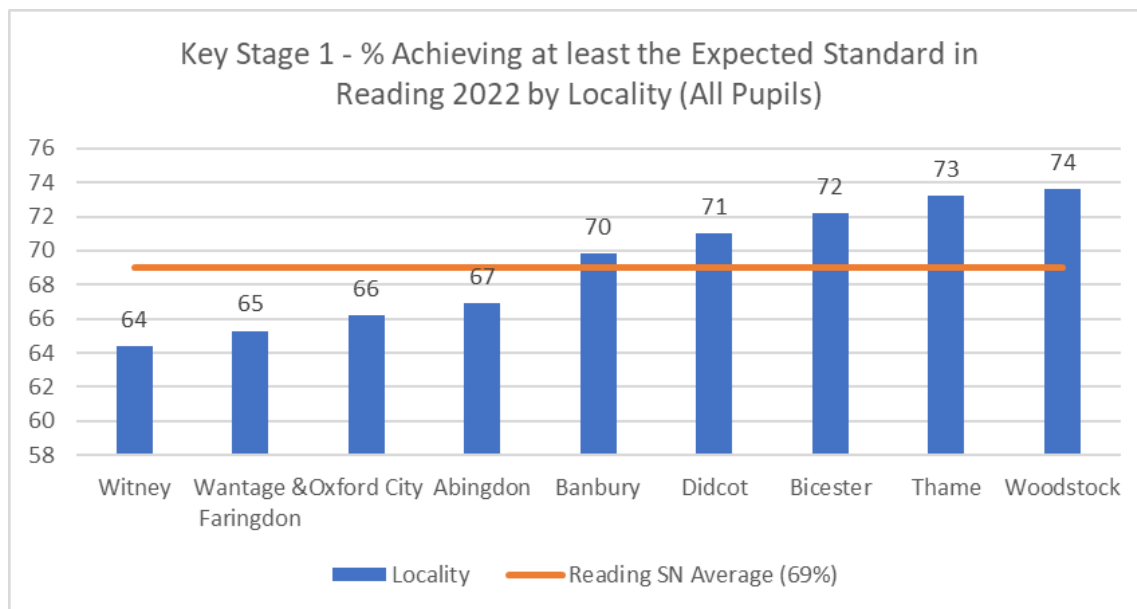


Figure 14: Percentage of pupils achieving at least the expected standard in reading by locality in 2022

In writing, the percentage of pupils working at the expected standard ranged from 52 per cent in the Wantage locality to 63 per cent in the Thame locality in 2022, and five localities were below the statistical neighbour average (see Figure 15).

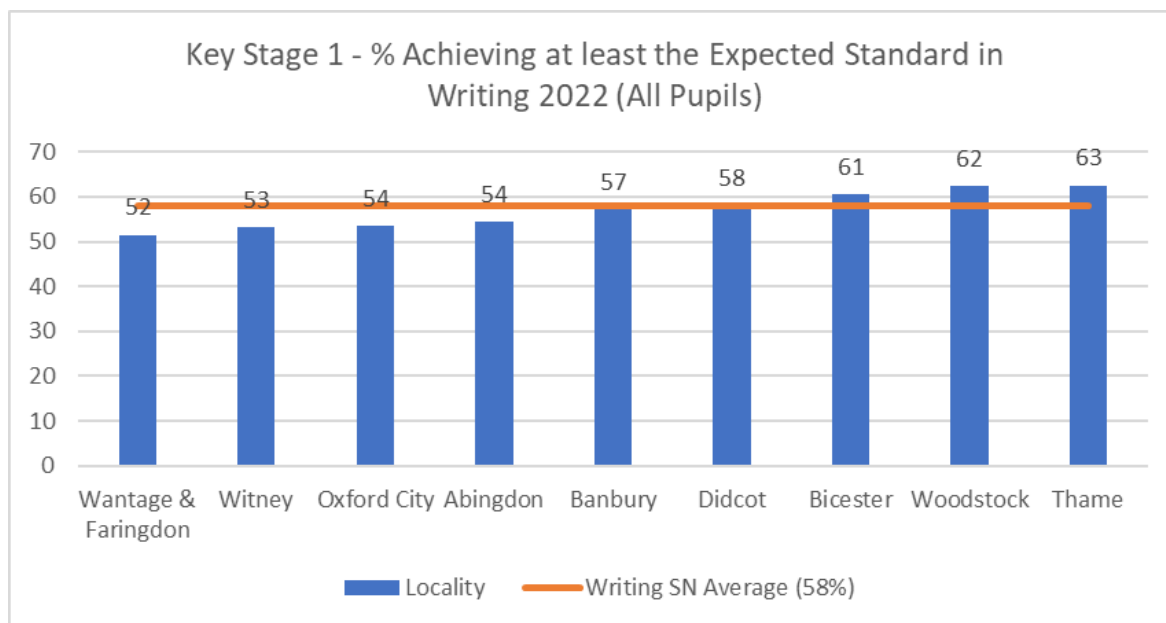


Figure 15: Percentage of pupils achieving at least the expected standard in writing by locality in 2022

In mathematics, the percentage of pupils working at the expected standard ranged from 65 per cent in the Wantage locality to 73 per cent in the Thame and Woodstock localities in 2022, and four localities were below the statistical neighbour average (see Figure 16).

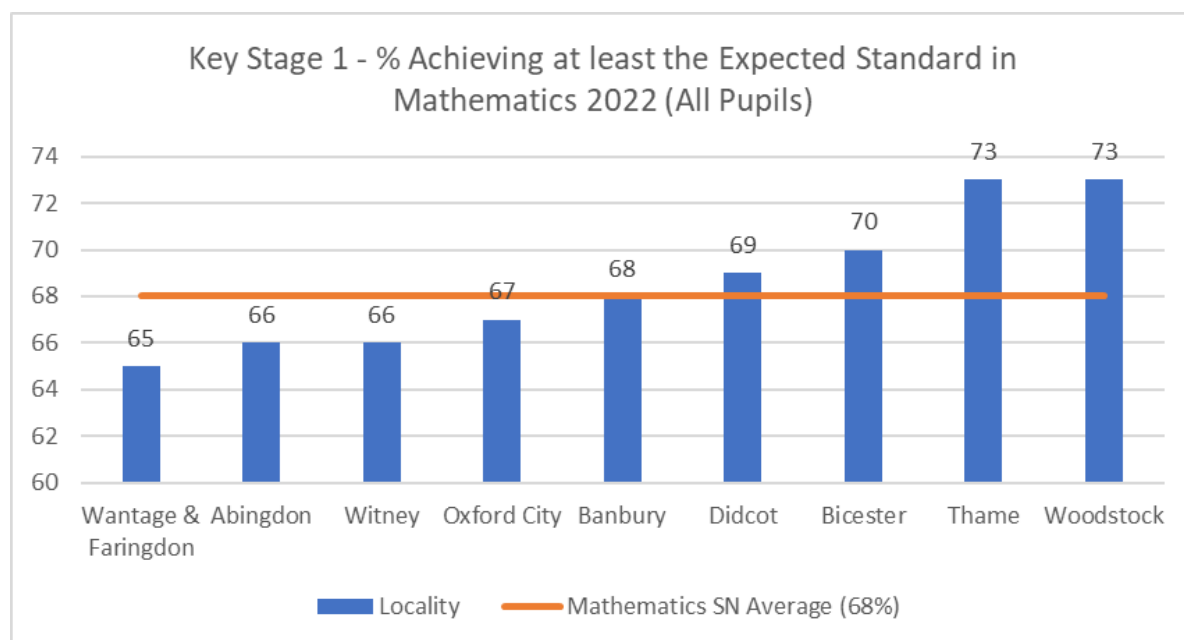


Figure 16: Percentage of pupils achieving at least the expected standard in mathematics by locality in 2022

Phonics Year 1 and Year 2

The percentage of pupils working at the expected standard in phonics in Year 1 ranged from 72 per cent in the Thame locality to 80 per cent in the Woodstock locality. Five localities scored below the statistical neighbour average in 2022 (see Figure 17).

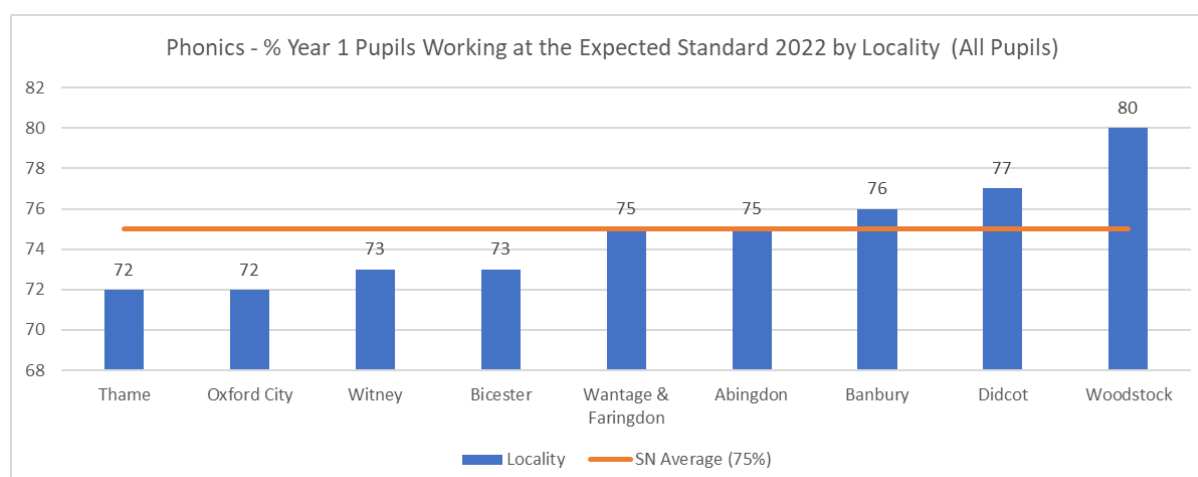


Figure 17: Percentage of pupils working at the expected standard in phonics in Year 1 by locality in 2022

In Year 2, the percentage of pupils working at the expected standard ranged from 86 per cent in the Oxford City, Witney, Banbury and Wantage localities to 92 per cent in the Didcot locality. Four localities scored below the statistical neighbour average (see Figure 18).

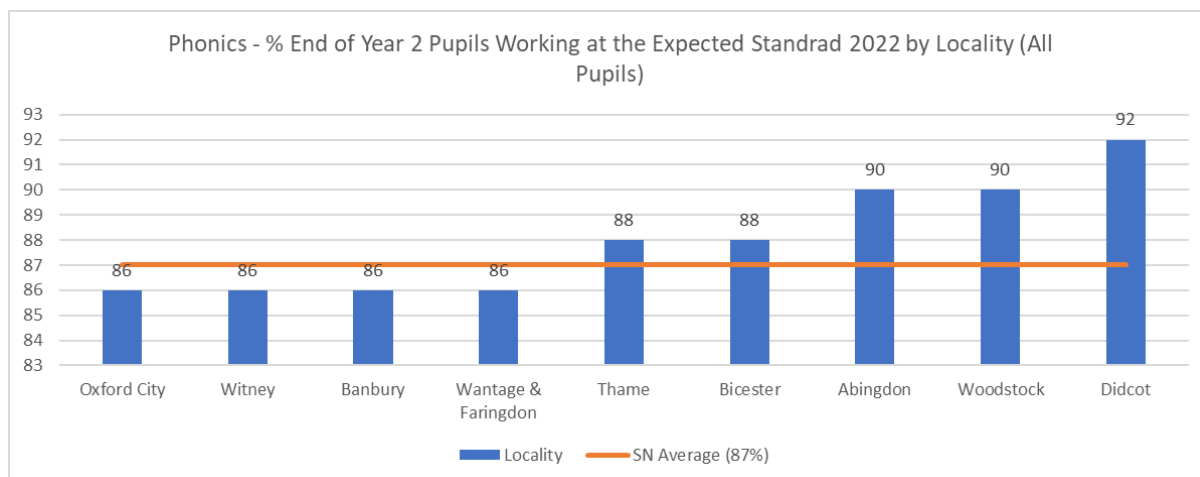


Figure 18: Percentage of pupils working at the expected standard in phonics by the end of Year 2 by locality in 2022

Key Stage 2

At Key Stage 2, the percentage of pupils working at the expected standard in RWM ranged from 52 per cent in the Witney locality to 65 per cent in the Woodstock locality in 2022 and three localities were below the statistical neighbour average (see Figure 19).

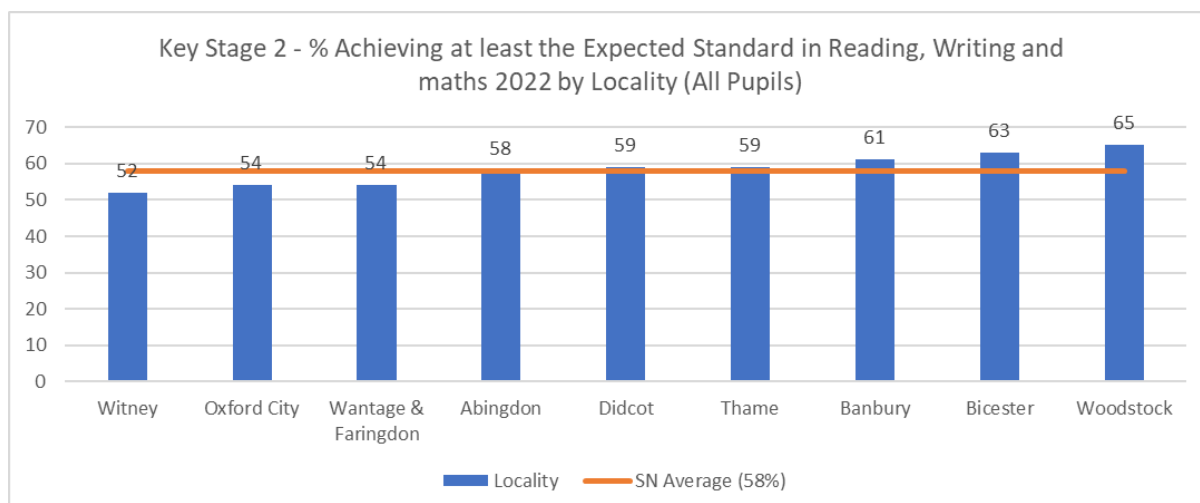


Figure 19: Percentage of pupils working at the expected standard in phonics in Year 1 by locality in 2022

Key Stage 4

At Key Stage 4, the average Attainment 8 score ranged from 48.1 in the Witney locality to 56.8 in the Woodstock locality in 2022, with seven localities falling below the statistical neighbour average (see Figure 20).

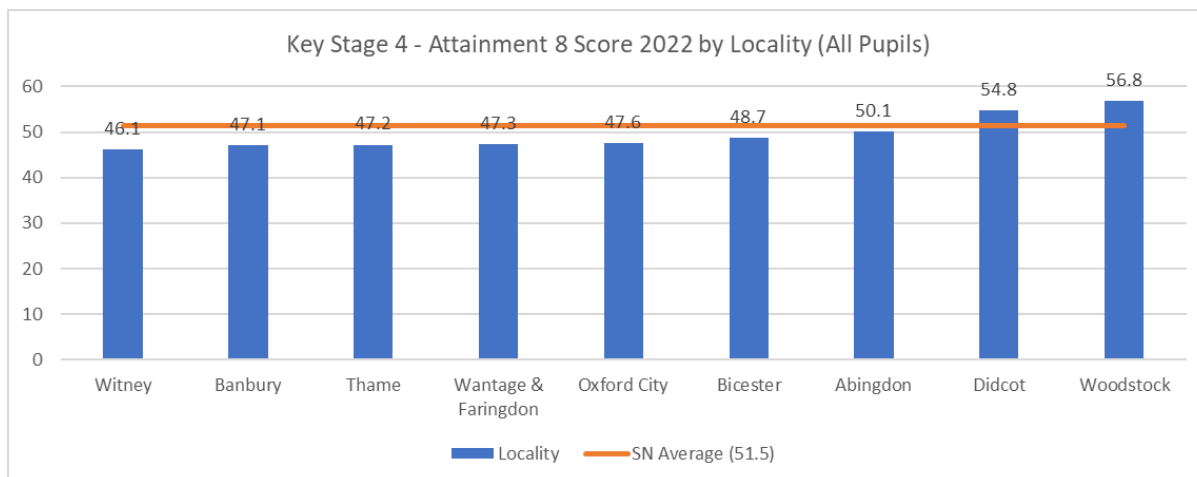


Figure 20: Attainment 8 score by locality in 2022

Outcomes for disadvantaged pupils

EYFSP

In 2022, 12 per cent of pupils (875) at the end of the EYFS were eligible for FSM, this compares to nine per cent nationally. The percentage of pupils eligible for FSM in Oxfordshire who achieved a good level of development was 43 per cent (6%pts below national; see Figure 21). This places Oxfordshire in the bottom quartile nationally, with only 14 LAs reporting a lower percentage. Five of these 14 LAs are statistical neighbours. The percentage of pupils achieving the expected level across all early learning goals and communication and language and literacy areas of learning were also below national, statistical neighbour and South East averages (see Figure 21).

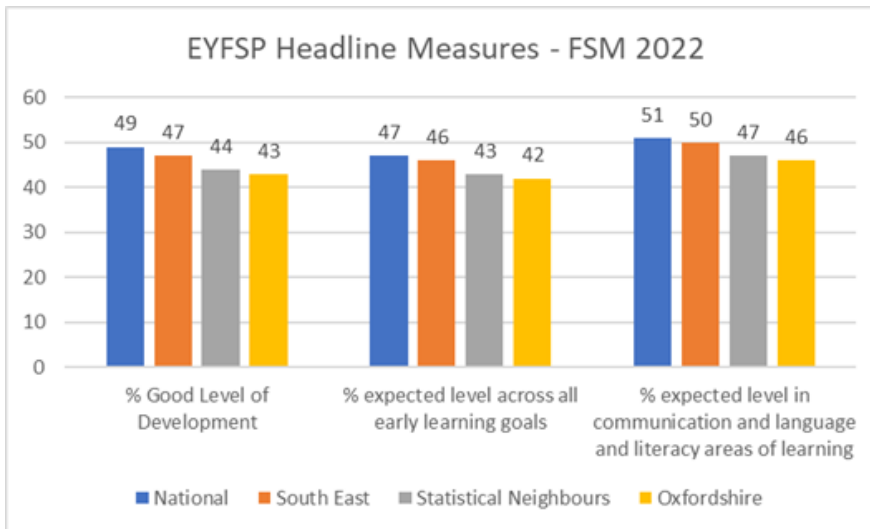


Figure 21: EYFSP headline measures for FSM pupils in 2022

The FSM gap, which is measured as the difference between children eligible for FSM and the national non-FSM result, in Oxfordshire was 25.7 percentage points in 2022. This is 6 percentage points wider than the national gap (see Figure 22).

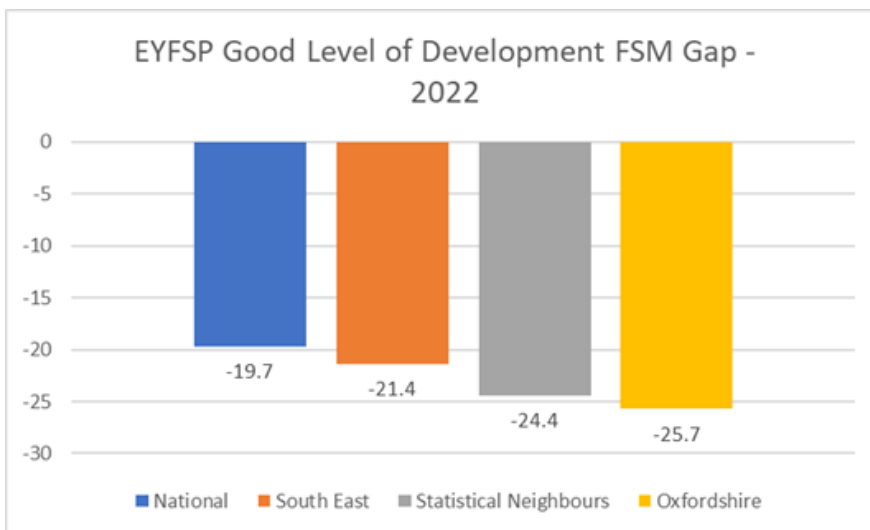


Figure 22: EYFSP good level of development FSM gap in 2022

Turning to look at differences between localities in Oxfordshire, the percentage of pupils eligible for FSM achieving a good level of development at EYFSP ranged from 30 per cent (cohort of 44 children) in Thame locality, to 54 per cent (cohort of 157 children) in Banbury locality. Seven localities fell below the statistical neighbour average in 2022 (see Figure 23) and eight below the national average. Only Banbury was above the national average.

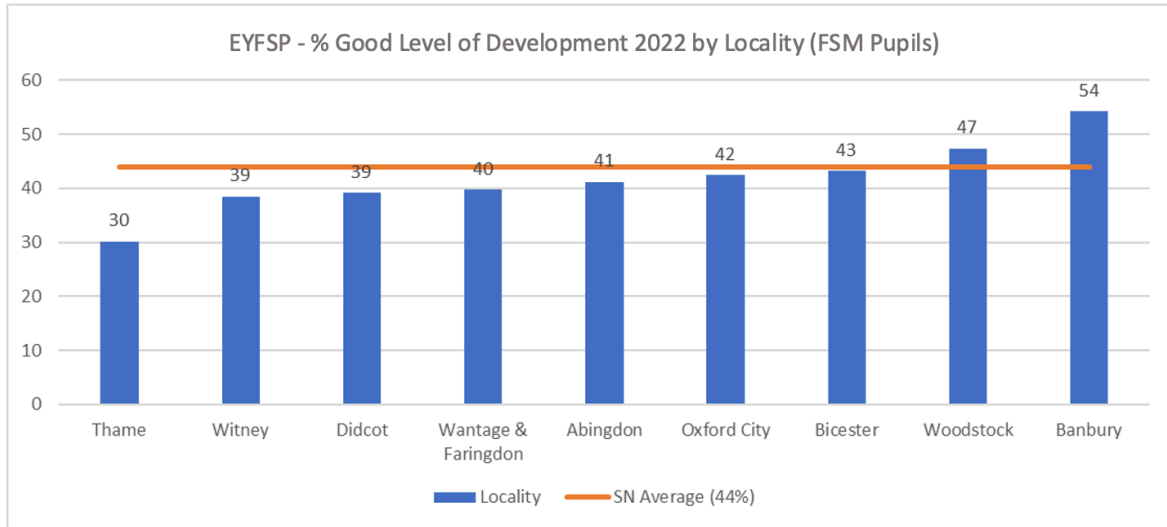


Figure 23: Percentage of FSM pupils achieving a good level of development by locality in 2022

Key Stage 1

By the end of Key Stage 1, the percentage of pupils eligible for FSM was 15 per cent of pupils (1,149) in 2022. This compares to 24 per cent nationally. Forty-six per cent of FSM pupils achieved at least the expected standard in reading, which was five percentage points below national, 31 per cent achieved at least the expected standard in writing (10%pts below national), 45 per cent achieved at least the expected standard in mathematics (7%pts below national) and 28 per cent achieved at least the expected standard in RWM combined (9%pts below national). This places Oxfordshire in the bottom quartile nationally for reading, writing and mathematics (see Table 6 for further comparisons between Oxfordshire’s Key Stage 1 results and the South East and statistical neighbours).

Table 6: Percentage of FSM pupils achieving at least the expected standard in reading, writing, mathematics and RWM combined at Key Stage 1 in 2022

Area	Cohort	% Achieving at least the expected standard			
		Reading	Writing	Mathematics	RWM*
National	-	51	41	52	37
South East	-	49	37	48	32
Statistical Neighbours	-	47	34	46	-
Oxfordshire	1,149	46	31	45	28

Figure 24 illustrates that the FSM gap in Year 1 has widened in Oxfordshire between 2019 and 2022.

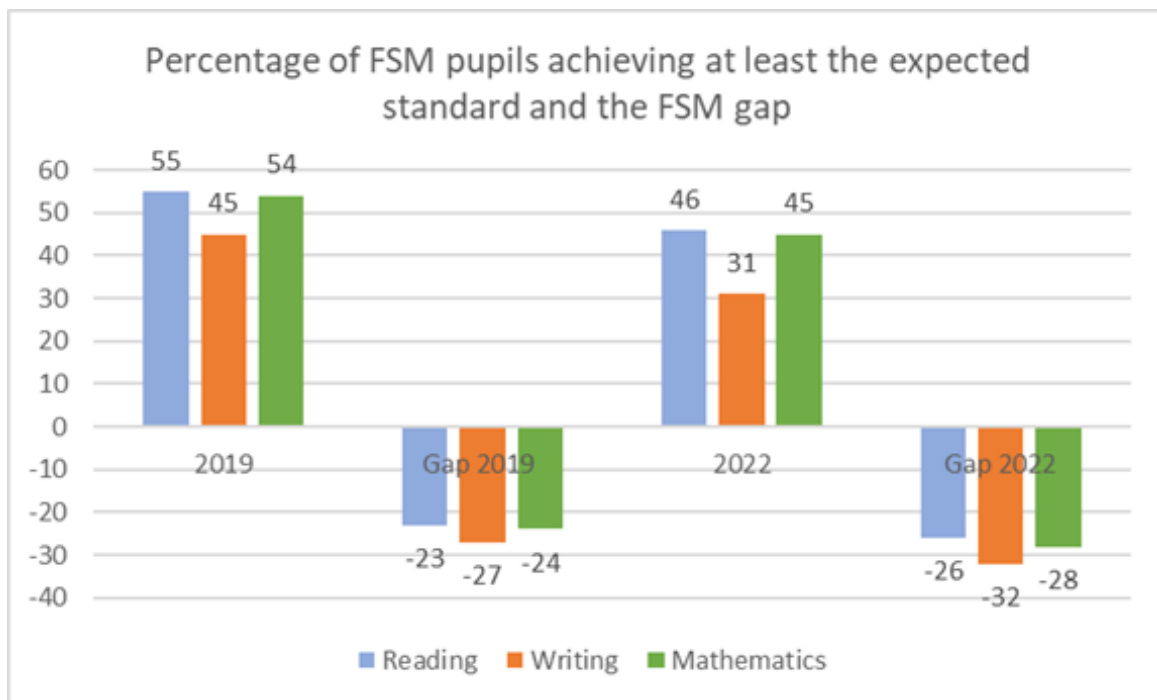


Figure 24: Percentage of FSM pupil achieving at least the expected standard in reading, writing and mathematics, alongside the FSM gap, in 2019 and 2022

Looking across localities, the percentage of pupils eligible for FSM working at the expected standard in reading and writing at the end of Year 1 was below the statistical neighbour average (47% reading; 34% writing) in Wantage and Faringdon (34% reading; 25% writing), Abingdon (37% reading; 20% writing), Oxford City (43% reading; 28% writing) and Witney (43% reading; 31% writing). The percentage of pupils eligible for FSM working at the expected standard in writing was also below the statistical neighbour average in Didcot. Two of these localities also scored below the statistical neighbour average (46%) for the percentage of pupils eligible for FSM working at the expected standard in mathematics, namely Abingdon (32%) and Wantage and Faringdon (35%). Thame (36%) and Bicester (45%) also scored below the statistical neighbour average (see Figures 25-27).

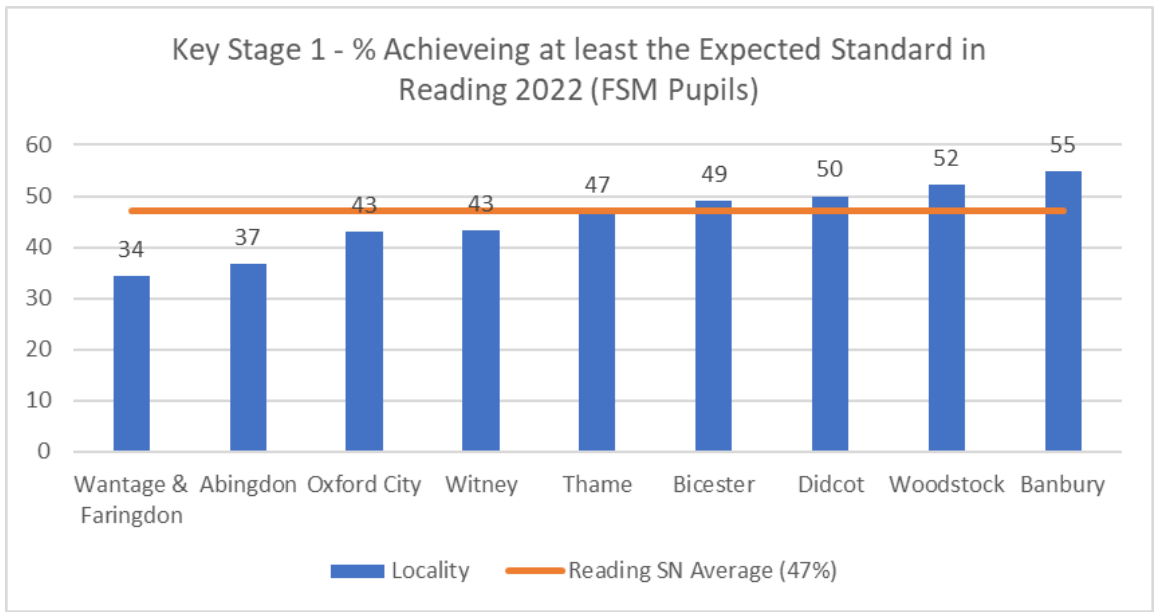


Figure 25: Percentage of FSM pupils achieving at least the expected standard in reading in 2022 by locality

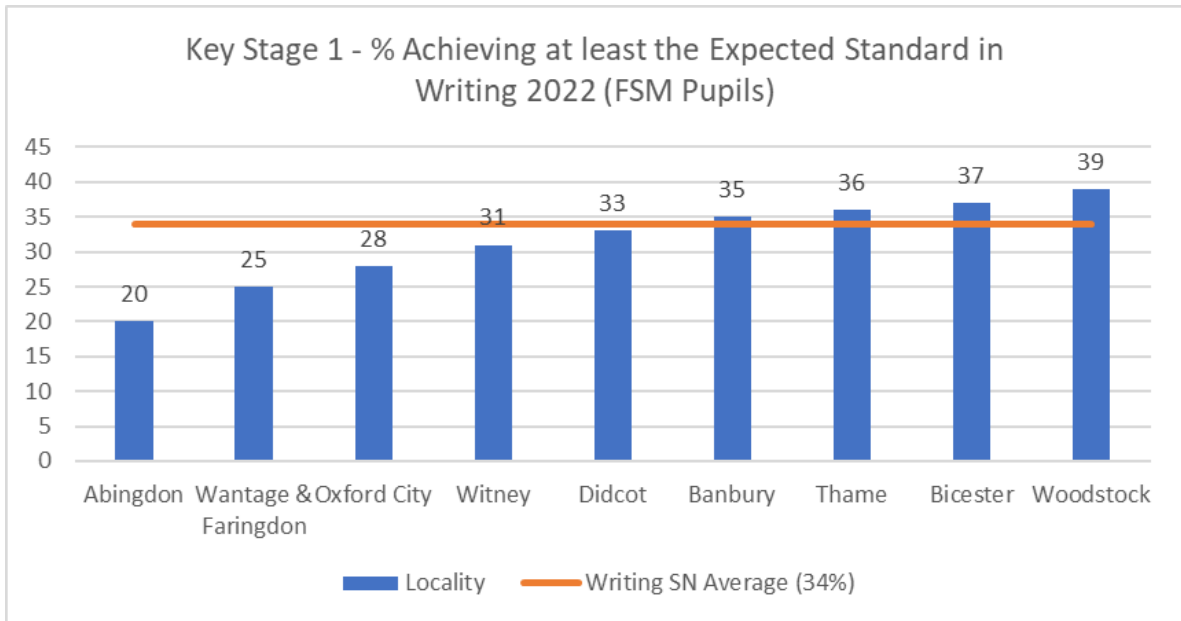


Figure 26: Percentage of FSM pupils achieving at least the expected standard in writing in 2022 by locality

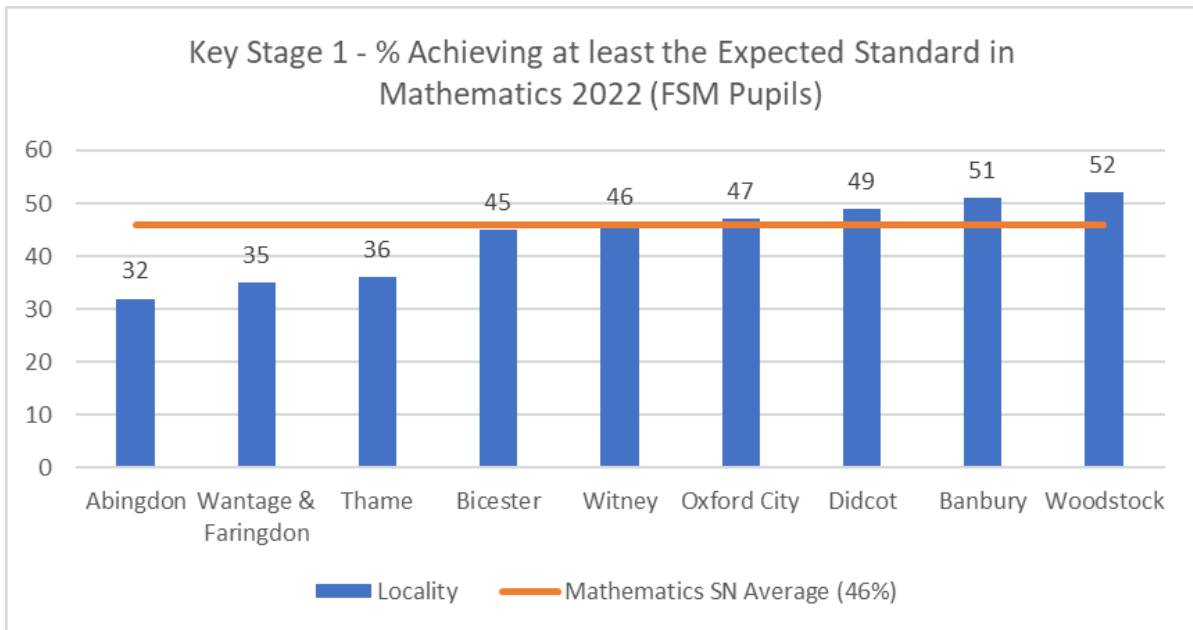


Figure 27: Percentage of FSM pupils achieving at least the expected standard in mathematics in 2022 by locality

Phonics Year 1 and Year 2

In terms of phonics, the percentage of Year 1 FSM pupils in Oxfordshire working at the expected level was 52 per cent in 2022 (10%pts below national). This places Oxfordshire in the bottom quartile nationally, with only two LA's (Windsor and Maidenhead and Isle of Wight) reporting a lower percentage. While the national FSM gap reduced between 2019 and 2022 from -18 to -17, in Oxfordshire the FSM gap which is already wider than the national gap increased from -20 in 2019 to -27 in 2022 (see Figure 28).

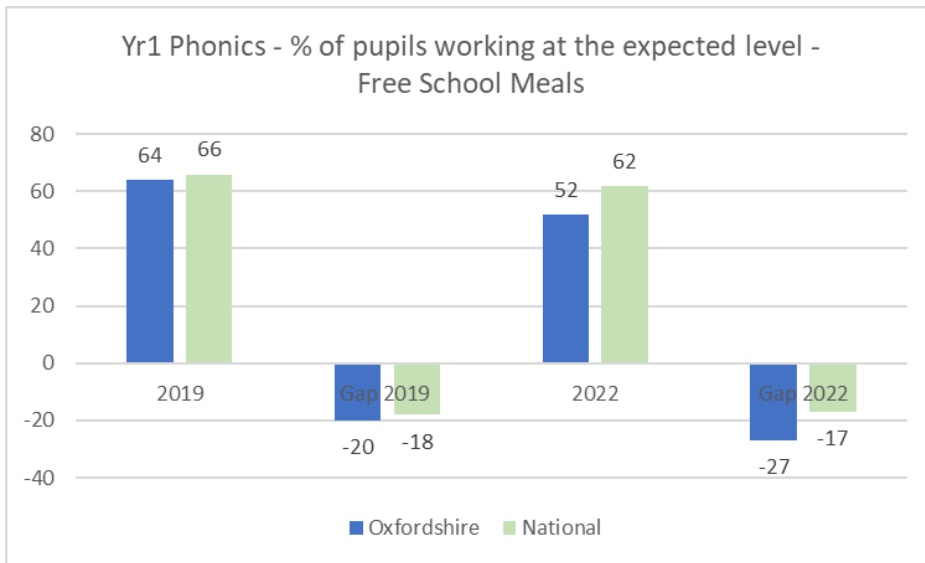


Figure 28: Percentages of FSM pupils working at the expected level in phonics in Year 1, alongside the FSM gap, in 2019 and 2022

Figure 29 shows that pupils in seven localities in Oxfordshire scored below the statistical neighbour average (56%) for the percentage of Year 1 pupils eligible for FSM working at the expected standard in phonics in 2022: Abingdon (41%); Didcot (46%); Wantage and Faringdon (47%); Thame (47%); Bicester (50%) and Banbury (51%). All localities scored below the national average (62%).

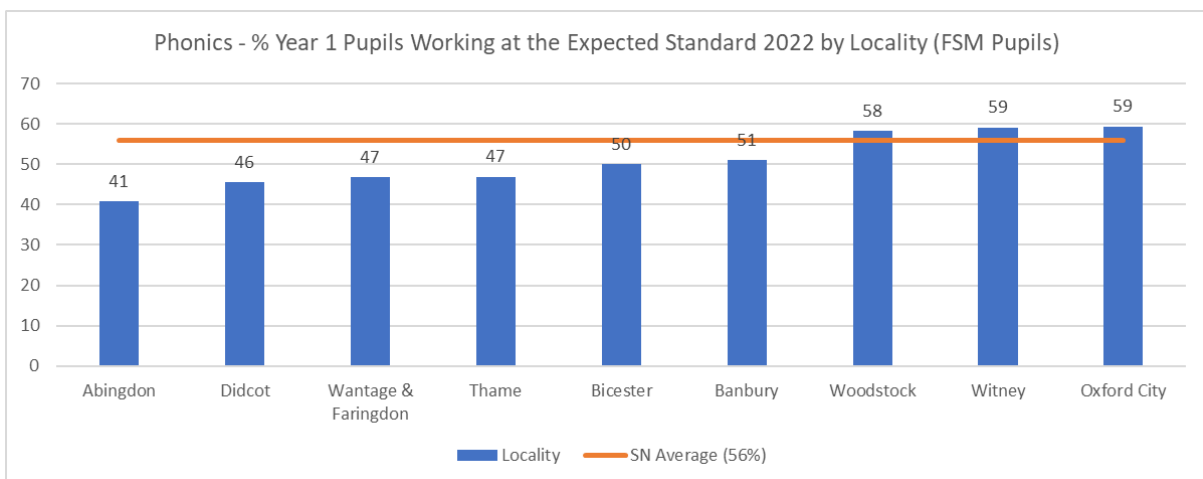


Figure 29: Percentage of FSM pupils working at the expected standard in phonics in Year 1 in 2022 by locality

While the percentage of pupils eligible for FSM working at the expected level in phonics at the end of Year 2 is higher than in Year 1, and one percentage point above the statistical neighbour average, the percentage (74%) is still four percentage points below national (see Table 7).

Table 7: Percentage of FSM pupils working at the expected level in phonics in Year 1 and end of Year 2

Area	% Working at the Expected Level			
	Yr 1 Cohort	% Year 1	End of Year 2 cohort	% End of Year 2
National	-	62	-	78
South East	-	57	-	75
Statistical Neighbours	-	56	-	73
Oxfordshire	1,031	52	1,138	74

Moreover, the FSM gap for phonics at the end of Year 2 in Oxfordshire has widened since 2019 from -12 to -16 in 2022 and remains larger than the national gap in 2022 (-16 in Oxfordshire compared to -12 nationally) (see Figure 30).

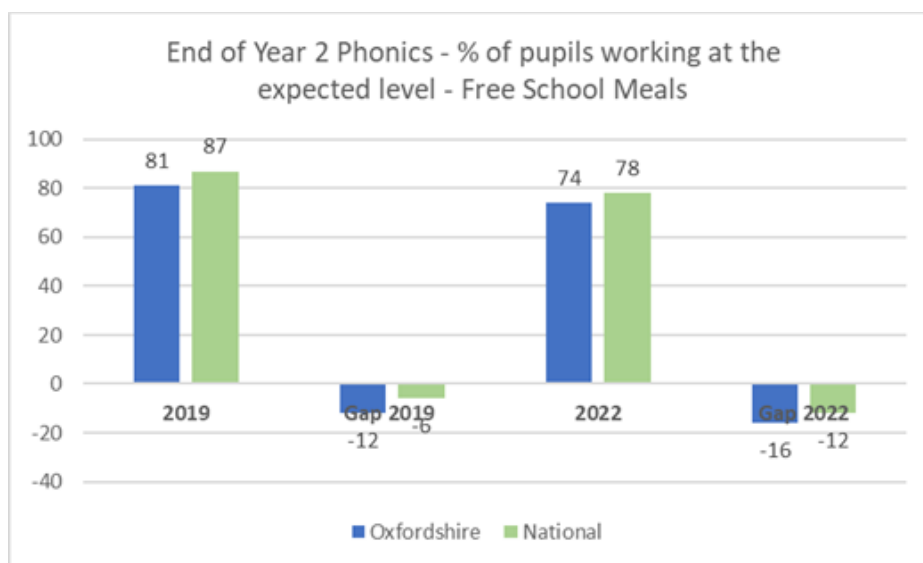


Figure 30: Percentage of FSM pupils working at the expected level in phonics at the end of Year 2, alongside the FSM gap, in 2019 and 2022

Figure 31 shows that pupils in four localities in Oxfordshire scored below the statistical neighbour average (73%) for the percentage of Year 2 pupils eligible for FSM working at the expected standard in phonics in 2022: Witney (63%); Thame (66%); Wantage and Faringdon (70%) and Abingdon (71%). Bicester was in line with the statistical neighbour average but below the LA average at 73 per cent.

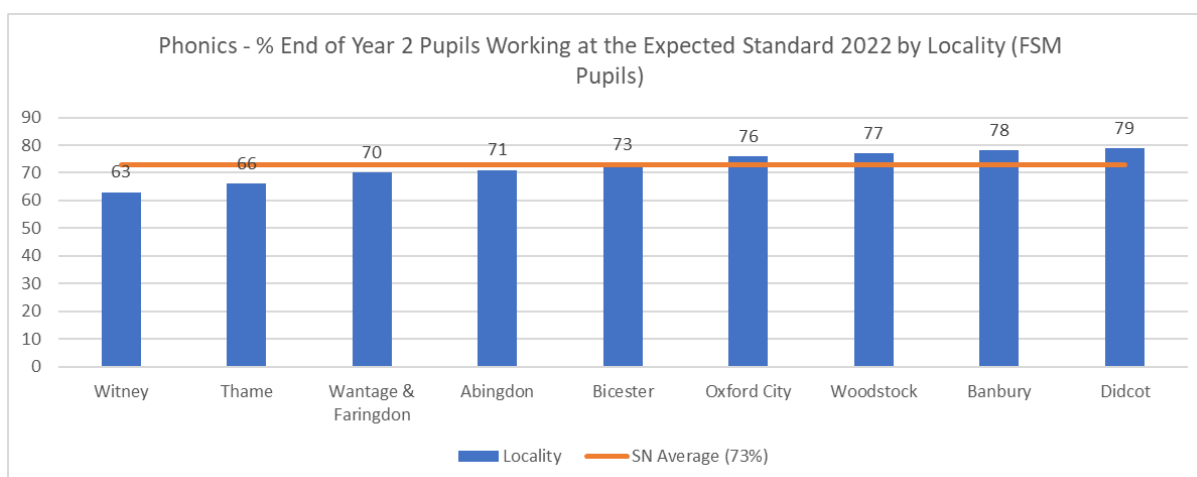


Figure 31: Percentage of pupils working at the expected standard in phonics at the end of Year 2 by locality

Key Stage 2

In 2022, at the end of Key Stage 2, 20 per cent of pupils (1,507) in Oxfordshire were disadvantaged. This compares to 30 per cent nationally. The percentage of disadvantaged pupils achieving at least the expected standard was lower than national, the South East and statistical neighbours across the board (see Table 8).

Table 8: Percentage of FSM pupils achieving at least the expected standard in reading, writing, mathematics and RWM combined

School	Cohort	% Achieving at least the expected standard			
		Reading	Writing	Maths	RWM
National	-	62	55	56	43
South East	-	60	51	52	38
Statistical Neighbours	-	58	49	50	35
Oxfordshire	1,507	57	48	47	34

Oxfordshire ranks in the bottom quartile nationally for the proportion of disadvantaged pupils achieving at least the expected standard in RWM combined (34%). Only four LAs reported a lower percentage (Central Bedfordshire, Norfolk, West Berkshire (statistical neighbour) and the Isle of Wight). Only one LA (Isle of Wight) recorded a lower proportion of disadvantaged pupils achieving at least the expected standard in mathematics. The disadvantage gap has widened more in Oxfordshire than nationally, from -26 percentage points in 2019 to -32 percentage points in 2022 (compared to -20 to -23 nationally; see Figure 32).

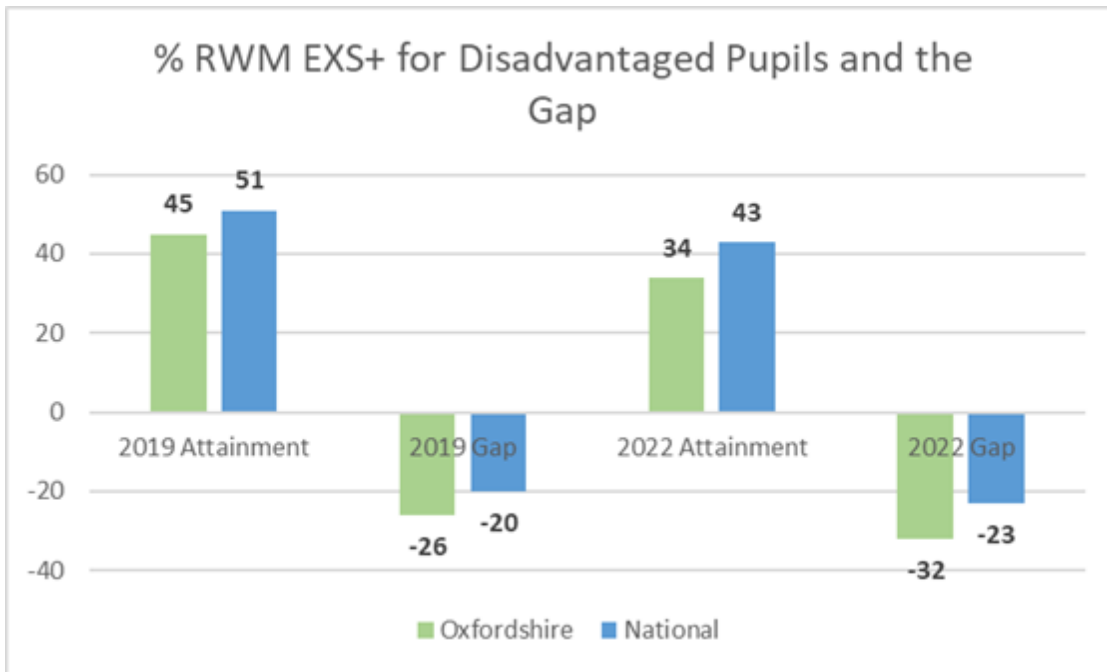


Figure 32: Percentage of disadvantaged pupils achieving at least the expected standard in RWM combined, alongside the disadvantage gap, in 2019 and 2022

Looking by locality (see Figure 33), five localities were below the statistical neighbour average (35%) in 2022 for the percentage of pupils eligible for FSM working at the expected standard in RWM: Thame (24%); Wantage and Faringdon (25%); Abingdon (28%); Didcot (30%) and Oxford City (33%).

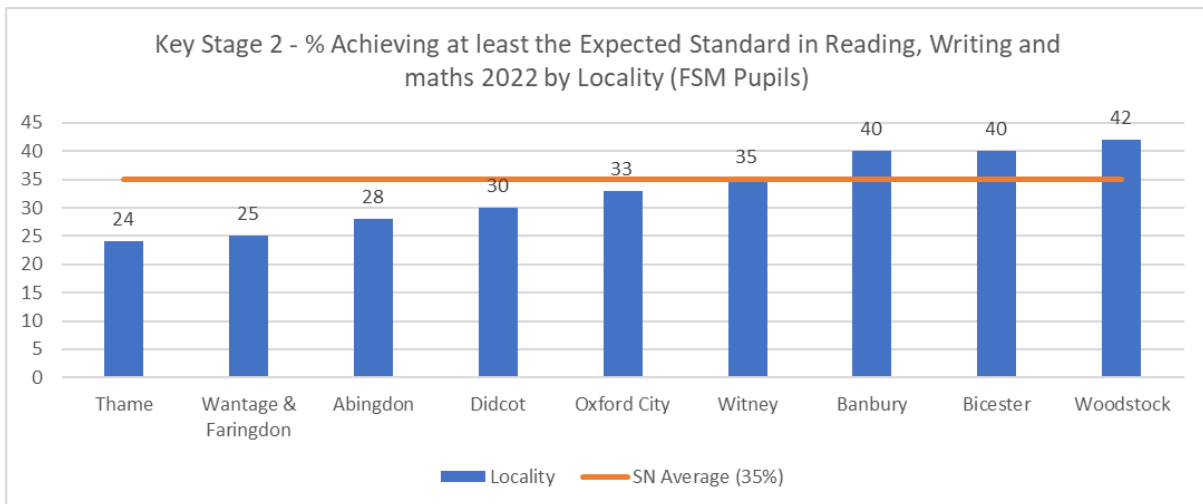


Figure 33: Percentage of FSM pupils achieving at least the expected standard in RWM at Key Stage 2 in 2022 by locality

Key Stage 4

In 2022, Oxfordshire ranked in the bottom quartile nationally for the average Attainment 8 score of pupils identified as being from disadvantage backgrounds and those who are FSM eligible and ranks 8th out of statistical neighbours. The average point score for disadvantaged pupils fell from 36.7 in 2021 to 34.8 in 2022 in Oxfordshire (see Table 9).

Table 9: Attainment 8 average point scores for disadvantaged pupils in Oxfordshire in 2022 compared to statistical neighbours, South East and national

Headlines – Attainment 8	Oxfordshire	Statistical Neighbours	South East	National
Disadvantaged pupils (av point score)	34.8	35.7	35.1	37.7
Compared to 2021	36.7	38.7	38.0	40.3
National Rank (quartile)	4 th (Jt 119 th) ←	-	-	-
SN Rank (out of 11)	8 th ↑	-	-	-

The proportion of pupils achieving grades 5 and above in both English and maths was lower than the national average for pupils receiving FSM (23.8%) and disadvantaged pupils (27.2%) in Oxfordshire. Seven localities fell below the statistical neighbour average (35.7%): Witney (26.8%); Wantage and Faringdon (30.3%); Oxford City (32.3%); Bicester (32.5%); Thame (32.8%); Banbury (33.3%) and Abingdon (34.9%); see Figure 34).

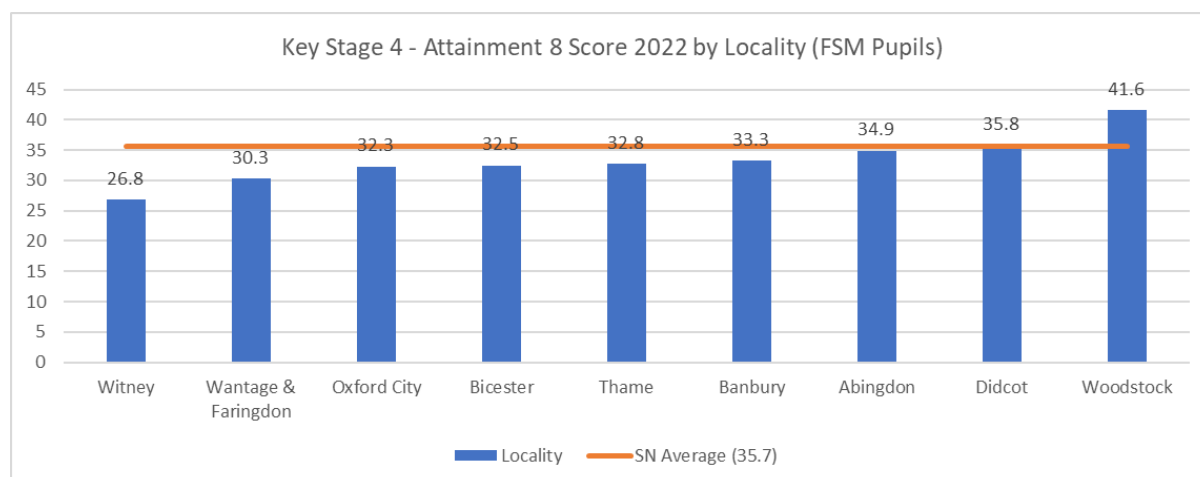


Figure 34: Attainment 8 score for FSM pupils at Key Stage 4 in Oxfordshire in 2022 by locality

Outcomes for pupils with SEND

EYFSP

In 2022, seven per cent (541) of pupils at the end of the EYFS in Oxfordshire were identified at SEN Support (compared to 8% nationally) and, mirroring the national figure, two per cent (117) had an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP). The percentage of pupils at SEN Support in Oxfordshire who achieved a good level of development was in line with the national average at 23 per cent and the percentage of pupils at SEN Support who achieved the expected level in communication and language and literacy areas of learning was one percentage point above the national average (27% in comparison to 28%; see Figure 35). However, the percentage of pupils with an EHCP in Oxfordshire achieving a good level of development was one percentage point below the national average at 3 per cent and the percentage achieving the expected level in communication and language and literacy areas of learning (4%) was one percentage point below the national average (5%) and two percentage points below the statistical neighbour and South East averages (both 6%; see Figure 36). This places Oxfordshire in the 2nd quartile nationally.

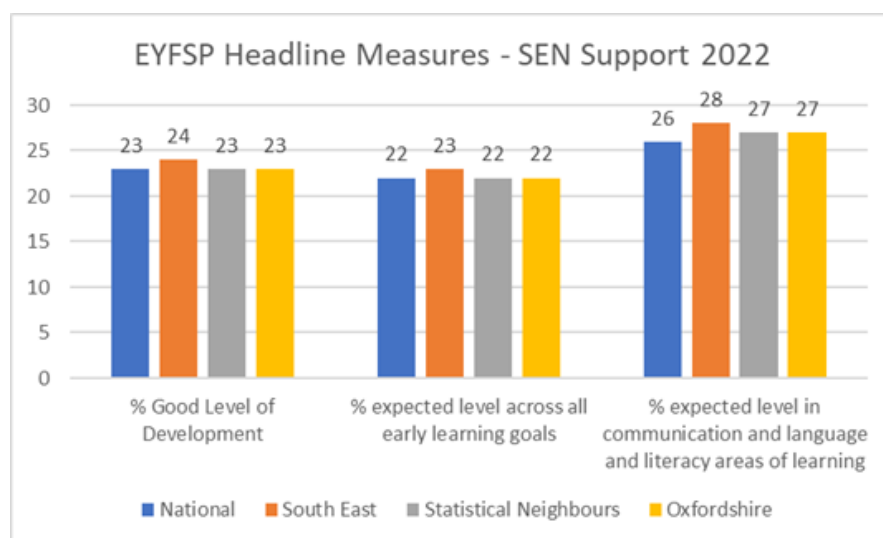


Figure 35: EYFSP headline measures for pupils at SEN Support in 2022

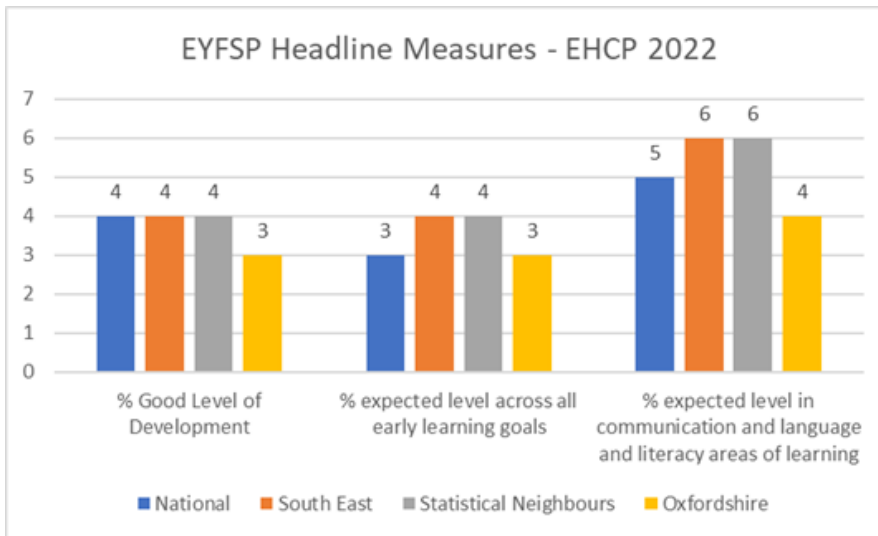


Figure 36: EYFSP headline measures for pupils with EHCPs in 2022

Key Stage 1

Between 2019 and 2022 the national average for the percentage of pupils identified at SEN Support achieving at least the expected standard in reading and mathematics declined, whereas the percentage achieving at least the expected standard in writing increased. In comparison, in Oxfordshire, while the percentage of pupils identified at SEN Support achieving at least the expected standard in reading remained the same, the percentage achieving at least the expected standard in mathematics increased, whereas the percentage achieving at least the expected standard in writing decreased albeit not by as much as the national average (see Figure 37).

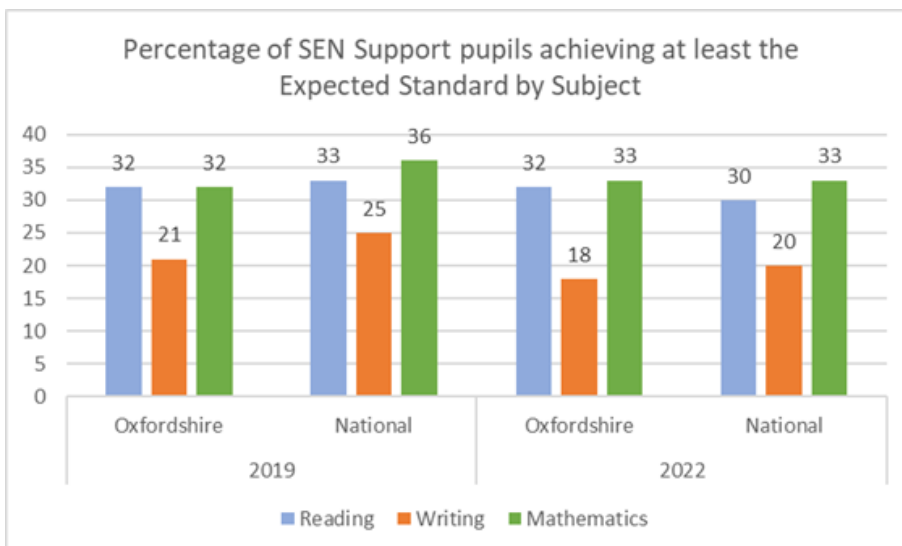


Figure 37: Percentage of SEN Support pupils achieving at least the expected standard in reading writing and mathematics in 2019 and 2022

Turning to pupils with an EHCP, whereas the percentage of pupils achieving at least the expected standard in reading and writing decreased and the percentage achieving at least the expected standard in mathematics remained the same nationally between 2019 and 2022, in Oxfordshire the percentage of pupils with EHCPs achieving at least the standard in all subjects increased and exceeded national averages (see Figure 38).

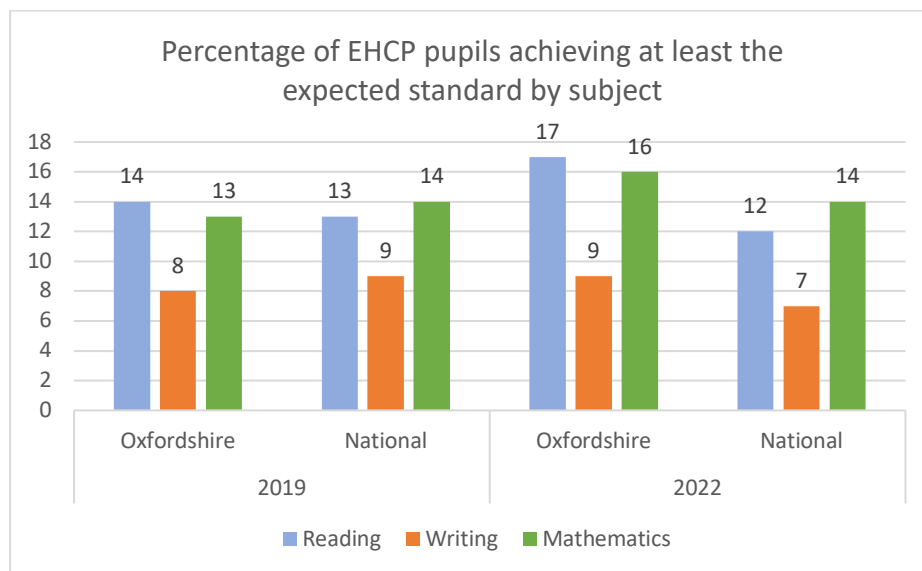


Figure 38: Percentage of EHCP pupils achieving at least the expected standard in reading, writing and mathematics in 2019 and 2022

Looking specifically at 2022, 14 per cent (1,077) of pupils at the end of Key Stage 1 in Oxfordshire were identified at SEN Support. This compared to 12 per cent nationally. Thirty-two per cent of pupils identified at SEN Support achieved at least the expected standard in reading. This is two percentage points above national and places Oxfordshire in the 2nd quartile nationally. Eighteen per cent of pupils identified at SEN Support achieved at least the expected standard in writing, this is two percentage points below the national average and places Oxfordshire in the 3rd quartile nationally. In line with the national average, 33 per cent of pupils identified at SEN Support achieved at least the expected standard in mathematics. This places Oxfordshire in the 2nd quartile nationally. The percentage of pupils at SEN Support achieving at least the expected standard in the RWM combined measure was one percentage point below the national average at 16 per cent compared to 17 per cent nationally (see Table 10).

Table 10: Percentage of SEN Support pupils achieving at least the expected standard in reading, writing, mathematics and RWM in 2022

Area	Cohort	% Achieving at least the expected standard			
		Reading	Writing	Mathematics	RWM*
National	-	30	20	33	17
South East	-	30	18	32	16
Statistical Neighbours	-	30	18	32	-
Oxfordshire	1,077	32	18	33	16

In 2022, two per cent (143) of pupils at the end of Key Stage 1 had an EHCP in Oxfordshire. This compares to three per cent nationally. Seventeen per cent of pupils with an EHCP achieved at least the expected standard in reading, five percentage points above the national average. Nine per cent achieved at least the expected standard in writing, two percentage points above national and 16 per cent achieved at least the expected standard in mathematics, two percentage points above national. This places Oxfordshire in the top quartile nationally for reading, writing and mathematics. Eight per cent of pupils with an EHCP in Oxfordshire achieved at least the expected standard in RWM combined, which was one percentage point higher than the national average (7%; see Table 11).

Table 11: Percentage of EHCP pupils achieving at least the expected standard in reading, writing, mathematics and RWM in 2022

Area	Cohort	% Achieving at least the expected standard			
		Reading	Writing	Mathematics	RWM*
National	-	12	7	14	7
South East	-	15	9	17	8
Statistical Neighbours	-	15	7	16	-
Oxfordshire	143	17	9	16	8

Phonics Year 1

While the national average for the percentage of pupils at SEN Support working at the expected level in phonics in Year 1 declined nationally between 2019 and 2022, the percentage increased in Oxfordshire, though it remains below the national average (see Figure 39).

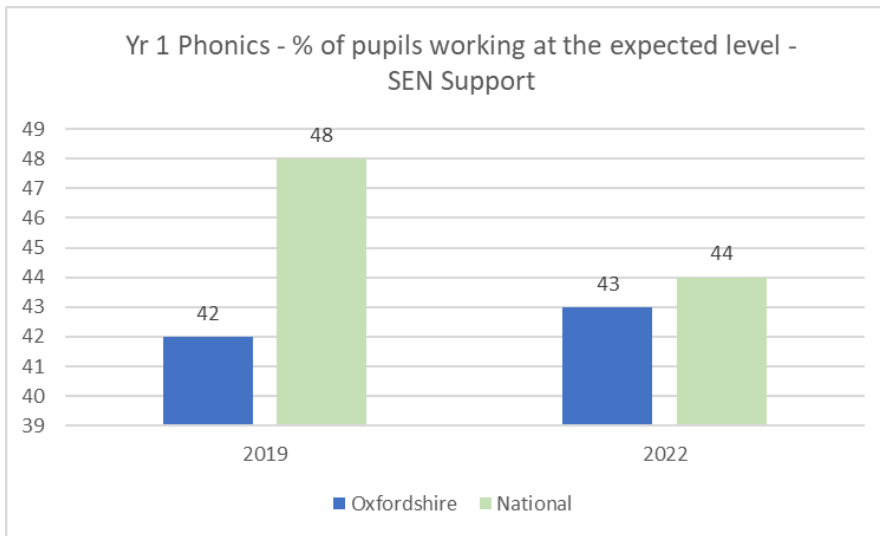


Figure 39: Percentage of SEN Support pupils working at the expected level in Year 1 phonics in 2019 and 2022

The percentage of pupils with EHCPs working at the expected level in phonics in Year 1 remained stable nationally between 2019 and 2022, whereas the percentage decreased in Oxfordshire, resulting in Oxfordshire dropping from being in-line with the national average to below the national average (see Figure 40).

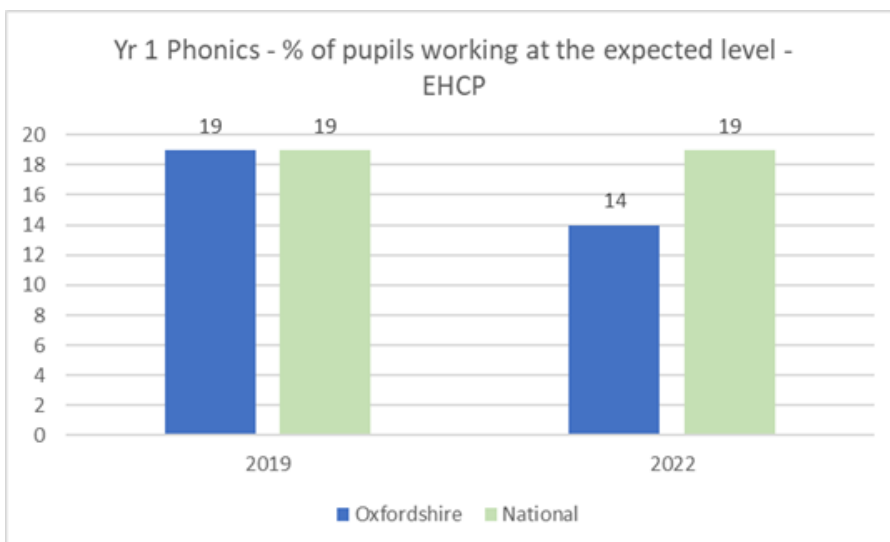


Figure 40: Percentage of EHCP pupils working at the expected level in Year 1 phonics in 2019 and 2022

In 2022, 18 per cent (850) of pupils completing the Year 1 phonics check were identified at SEN Support. This compares to 11 per cent nationally. Forty-three per cent of Year 1 SEN Support pupils in Oxfordshire were working at the expected level in 2022. This is one percentage point below national (44%) and places Oxfordshire in the 3rd quartile nationally.

Three per cent (213) of pupils completing the Year 1 phonics check in 2022 had an EHCP in Oxfordshire. This compares to three per cent nationally. Fourteen per cent of Year 1 pupils with an EHCP in Oxfordshire were working at the expected level, five percentage points below the national average. This again placed Oxfordshire in the 3rd quartile nationally.

Phonics Year 2

Both the national and local averages for the percentage of pupils at SEN Support working at the expected level in phonics at the end of Year 2 declined between 2019 and 2022. Where in 2019 the percentage of pupils at SEN Support working at the expected level was one percentage point below the national average, in 2022 it was one percentage point above the national average (see Figure 41).

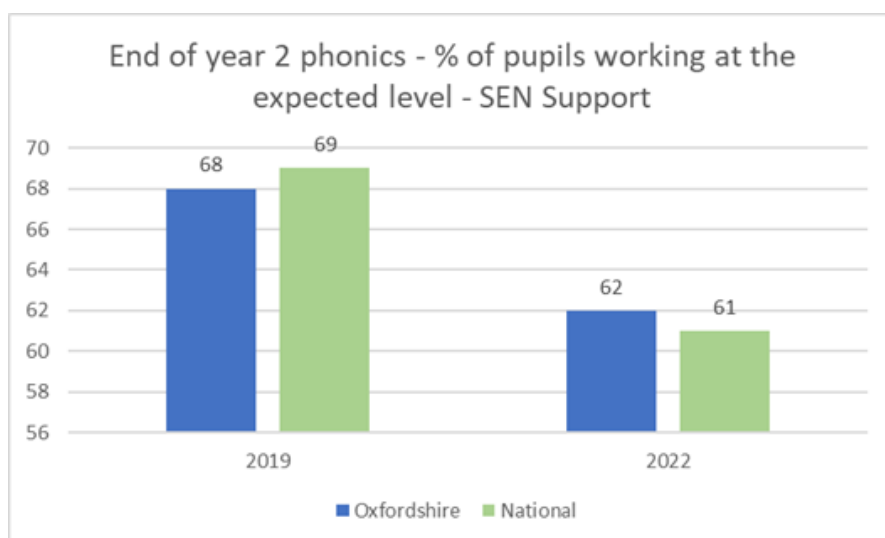


Figure 41: Percentage of SEN Support pupils working at the expected level in phonics at the end of Year 2 in 2019 and 2022

While the percentage of pupils with EHCPs working at the expected level in phonics at the end of Year 2 declined nationally between 2019 and 2022, the percentage increased in Oxfordshire from 25 per cent to 34 per cent (see Figure 42).

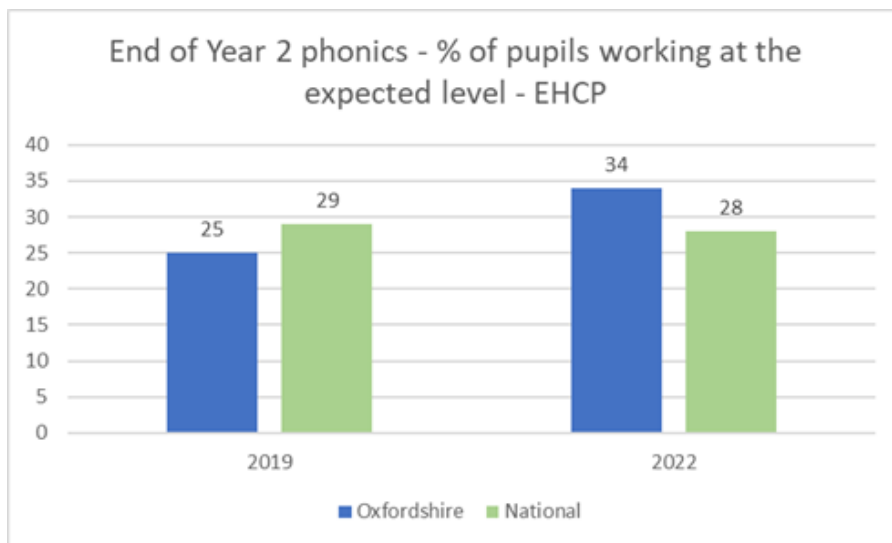


Figure 42: Percentage of EHCP pupils working at the expected level in phonics at the end of Year 2 in 2019 and 2022

In 2022, 62 per cent of pupils identified at SEN Support in Oxfordshire were working at the expected level in phonics at the end of Year 2. This places Oxfordshire in the 2nd quartile nationally (see Table 12).

Table 12: Percentage of SEN Support pupils working at the expected level in phonics in Year 1 and at the end of Year 2 in 2022

Area	% Working at the Expected Level			
	Yr 1 Cohort	% Year 1	End of Year 2 cohort	% End of Year 2
National	-	44	-	61
South East	-	42	-	60
Statistical Neighbours	-	42	-	60
Oxfordshire	850	43	1075	62

Thirty-four per cent of pupils with an EHCP in Oxfordshire were working at the expected level in phonics at the end of Year 2, six percentage points above the national average. This places Oxfordshire in the top quartile nationally (see Table 13).

Table 13: Percentage of EHCP pupils working at the expected level in phonics in Year 1 and at the end of Year 2 in 2022

Area	% Working at the Expected Level			
	Yr 1 Cohort	% Year 1	End of Year 2 cohort	% End of Year 2
National	-	19	-	28
South East	-	19	-	31
Statistical Neighbours	-	20	-	30
Oxfordshire	213	14	218	34

Key Stage 2

Between 2019 and 2022, the percentage of pupils at SEN Support and with an EHCP reaching the expected standard in RWM declined both nationally and in Oxfordshire. While the percentage of pupils at SEN Support reaching the expected standard in RWM in Oxfordshire was lower than the national figure in both 2019 and 2022, the percentage of pupils with an EHCP reaching the expected standard was higher than the national figure in both 2019 and 2022 (see Figure 43).

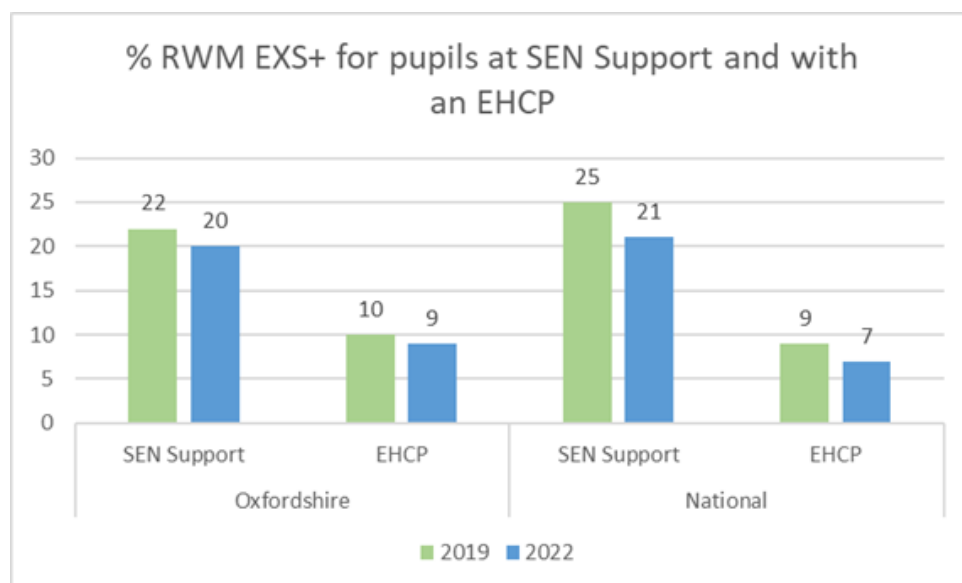


Figure 43: Percentage of SEN Support pupils and pupils with EHCPs achieving the expected standard in RWM in 2019 and 2022

In 2022, 19 per cent (1,461) of pupils at the end of Key Stage 2 in Oxfordshire were at SEN Support compared to 15 per cent nationally. Four per cent (319) of pupils in Oxfordshire had an EHCP compared to 4 per cent nationally. Twenty per cent of pupils at SEN Support reached the expected

standard in RWM combined, compared with 21 per cent of SEN Support pupils nationally (see Table 14).

Table 14: Percentage of SEN Support pupils achieving at least the expected standard in reading, writing, mathematics and RWM in 2022

School	Cohort	% Achieving at least the expected standard			
		Reading	Writing	Maths	RWM
National	-	44	30	40	21
South East	-	44	30	39	20
Statistical Neighbours	-	44	29	40	19
Oxfordshire	1,461	45	31	38	20

Nine per cent of pupils with an EHCP reached the expected standard in RWM combined, compared with seven per cent of pupils with an EHCP nationally (see Table 15).

Table 15: Percentage of EHCP pupils achieving at least the expected standard in reading, writing, mathematics and RWM in 2022

School	Cohort	% Achieving at least the expected standard			
		Reading	Writing	Maths	RWM
National	-	16	11	15	7
South East	-	18	11	16	8
Statistical Neighbours	-	18	11	17	8
Oxfordshire	319	19	12	17	9

Key Stage 4

At Key Stage 4, the Attainment 8 average point score for pupils identified at SEN Support increased between 2021 and 2022. In comparison, the Attainment 8 average point score for pupils with an EHCP in Oxfordshire decreased between 2021 and 2022 from 14.9 to 14.1. This said, Oxfordshire ranks in the 3rd quartile and 10th out of 11 statistical neighbours for both pupils identified at SEN Support and pupils with an EHCP (see Table 16).

Table 16: Headline Attainment 8 figures for SEN Support pupils and pupils with EHCPs in 2022

Headlines – Attainment 8	Oxfordshire	Statistical Neighbours	South East	National
EHCP (av point score)	14.1	16.5	14.7	14.3
Compared to 2021	14.9	17.2	16.8	15.7
National Rank (quartile)	3 rd (Jt 79 th) ↓	-	-	-
SN Rank (out of 11)	10 th ↓	-	-	-
SEN support (av point score)	33.2	37.9	35.2	34.9
Compared to 2021	32.6	40.0	36.5	36.4
National rank (quartile)	3 rd (96 th) ↑	-	-	-
SN Rank (out of 11)	10 th ↑	-	-	-

In 2022, the percentage of pupils achieving grades 5 and above in both English and mathematics was lower than the national average for pupils at SEN Support (20.6%), whereas the percentage of pupils with an EHCP achieving grades 5 and above in both English and mathematics was higher than the national average (see Figure 44).

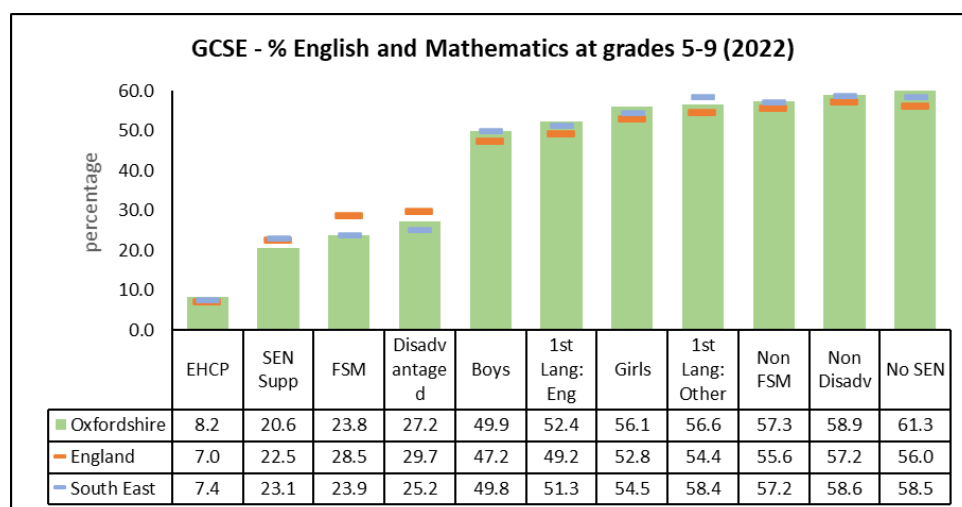


Figure 44: Percentage of pupils achieving grades 5 and above in both English and mathematics in 2022 by characteristics groups

Figure 44 shows that Pupils at SEN Support, FSM pupils and disadvantaged pupils are the characteristics groups where the percentage of pupils achieving grades 5 and above in both English and mathematics is lower than the national average. When it comes to the average Attainment 8 score, Figure 45 illustrates that pupils with an EHCP, pupils at SEN Support, FSM pupils, disadvantaged pupils and English as an Additional Language (EAL) pupils are the characteristics groups where the average Attainment 8 score in Oxfordshire is below the national average.

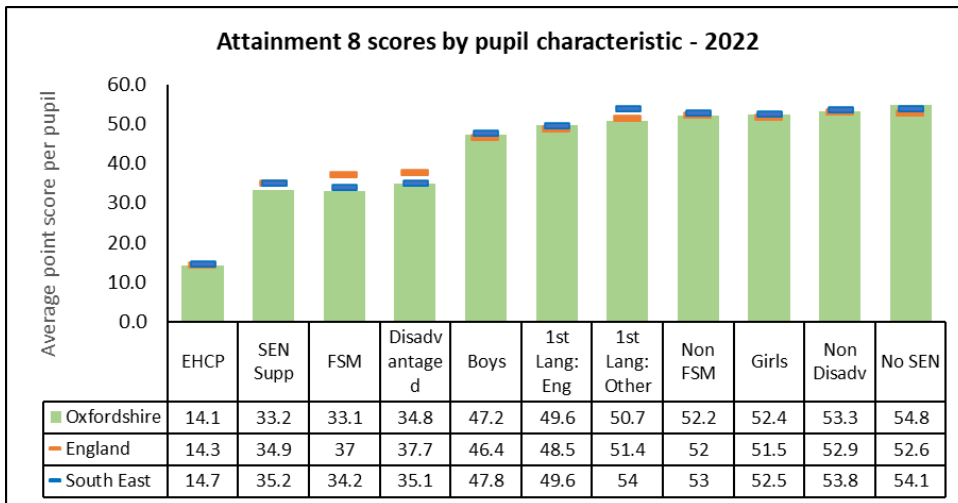
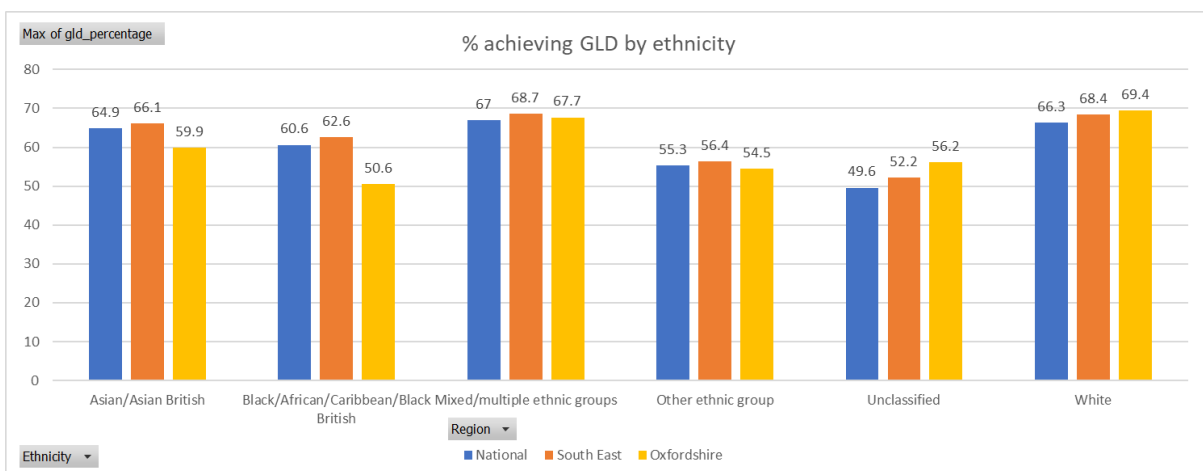


Figure 45: Average Attainment 8 scores by pupil characteristics in 2022

Outcomes for pupils from different ethnicities

EYFSP

In 2022, the percentage of pupils of Black heritage in Oxfordshire who achieved a good level of development (78 children) was 10 per cent below the national average and 12 per cent below the regional average. The percentage of children of Asian heritage in Oxfordshire who achieved a good level of development (305 children) was five per cent below the national average (see Figure 46). The percentage of children who achieved a good level of development in the Other ethnic group in 2022 was also below the national average.



Group	2022 Cohort
White	5702
Mixed/multiple ethnic groups	589
Asian/Asian British	509
Black/African/Caribbean/Black British	154
Other ethnic group	121
Unclassified	290

Figure 46: Percentage of pupils achieving a good level of development by ethnicity in 2022

Figure 47 shows that the percentage of children of Black heritage achieving a good level of development in Oxfordshire decreased between 2018 and 2022 and the decline was steeper than the decline seen nationally and in the statistical neighbour LAs. While the percentage of Asian heritage children achieving a good level of development increased between 2018 and 2019, it subsequently decreased in 2022 (see Figure 47).

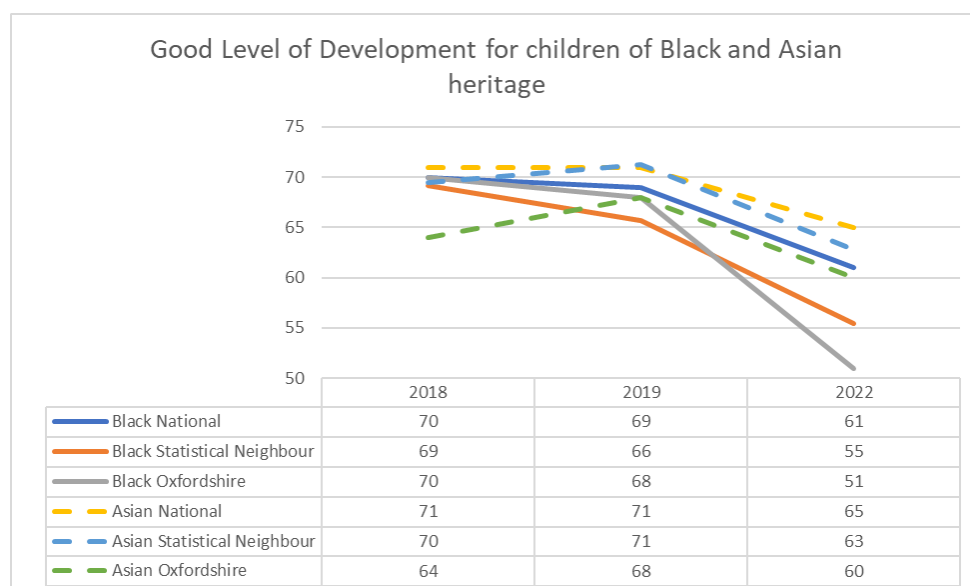
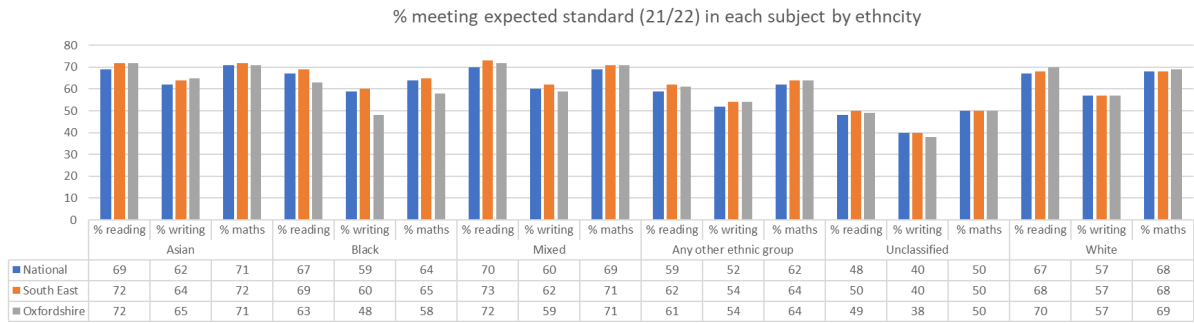


Figure 47: Percentage of pupils of Black heritage and Asian heritage achieving a good level of development in the EYFSP in 2022

Key Stage 1

In 2022, performance was generally at or above the national average in each subject. However, pupils of Black heritage in all areas (reading, writing and mathematics) performed below the national average. This pupil group were 11 percentage points below the national average in writing. The percentage of pupils of Mixed heritage (567) achieving the national average in writing was below the national average. Pupils whose ethnicity was not reported (223 children in Oxfordshire) had low scores generally, and for these children in writing only 38 per cent achieved the expected standard, which was two per cent below the national average (see Figure 48).



Group	2022 Cohort
White	5910
Mixed	567
Black	176
Asian	569
Unclassified	223
Any other ethnic group	140

Figure 48: Percentage of pupils meeting the expected standard in reading, writing and mathematics in 2022 by ethnicity

Further analysis was carried out to examine whether there was any gender component to Black pupil achievement (see Figure 49). Boys of Black heritage achieved lower scores than girls of Black heritage in all areas, a trend that is also seen nationally and regionally (regionally not shown on graph).

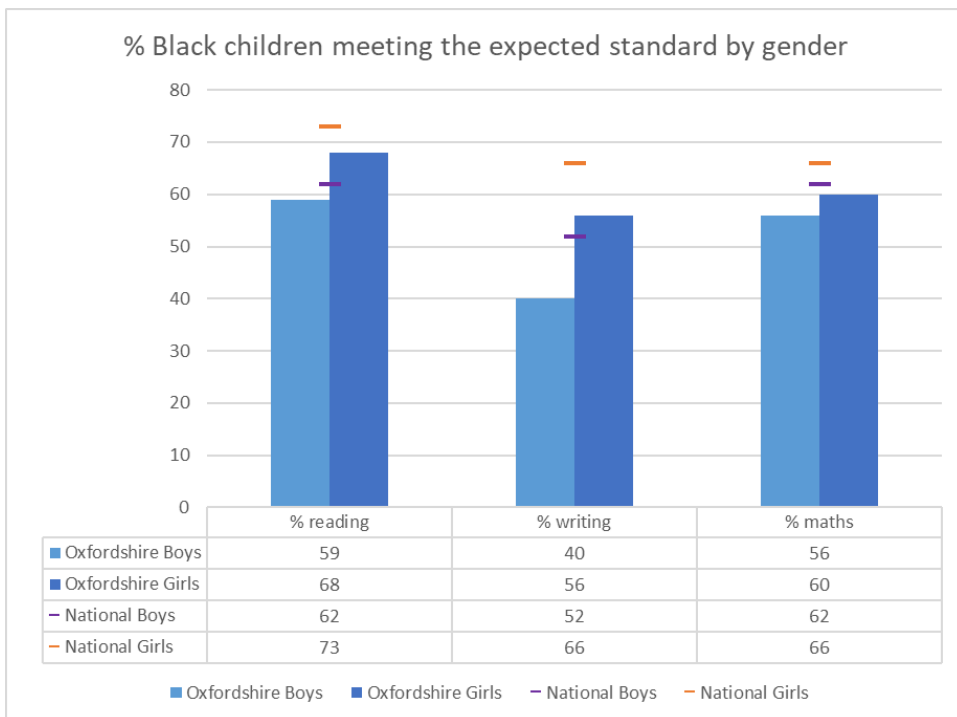
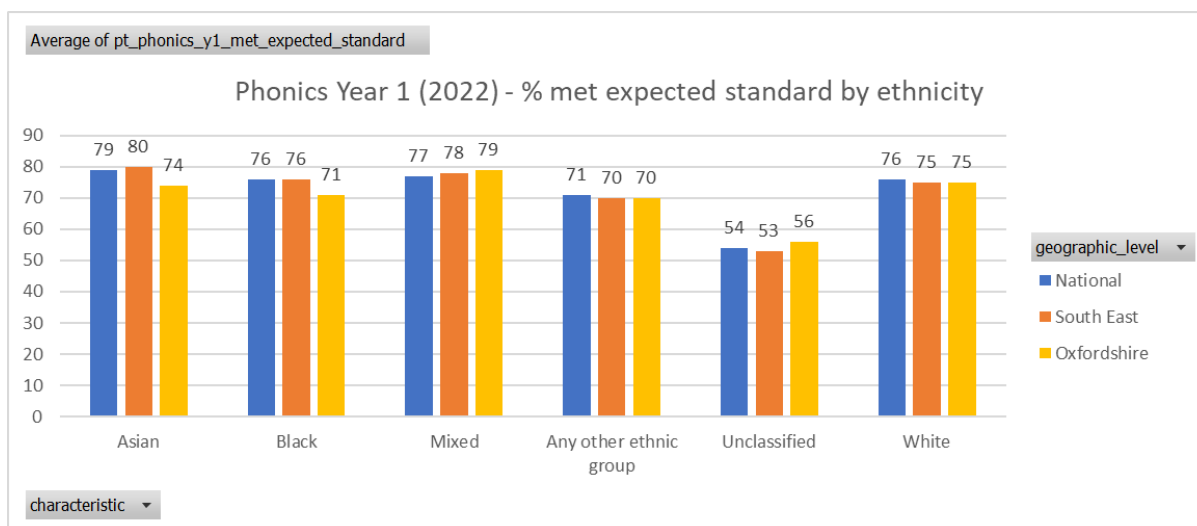


Figure 49: Percentage of Black boys and girls meeting the expected standard in reading, writing and mathematics

Phonics Year 1 and Year 2

In the Year 1 phonics test, the percentage of pupils of Black heritage that met the expected standard (130 children) in Oxfordshire was five per cent below the national average. The percentage of pupils of Asian heritage that met the expected standard (394 children) was also five per cent below the national average (see Figure 50).



Group	2022 Cohort
White	5912
Asian	529
Mixed	616
Black	183
Unclassified	243
Any other ethnic group	155

Figure 50: Percentage of pupils who met the expected standard in Year 1 phonics in 2022 by ethnicity

Figure 51 shows that the percentage of pupils of Black heritage working at the expected level in phonics in Year 1 in Oxfordshire decreased between 2018 and 2022. While this decrease was more than the decrease seen nationally, it was not as large as the decrease in the statistical neighbour LAs. A general decline in the percentage of Asian heritage pupils working at the expected level in phonics in Year 1 was also seen nationally, locally and in the statistical neighbour LAs between 2018 and 2022. The smallest decline was in Oxfordshire.

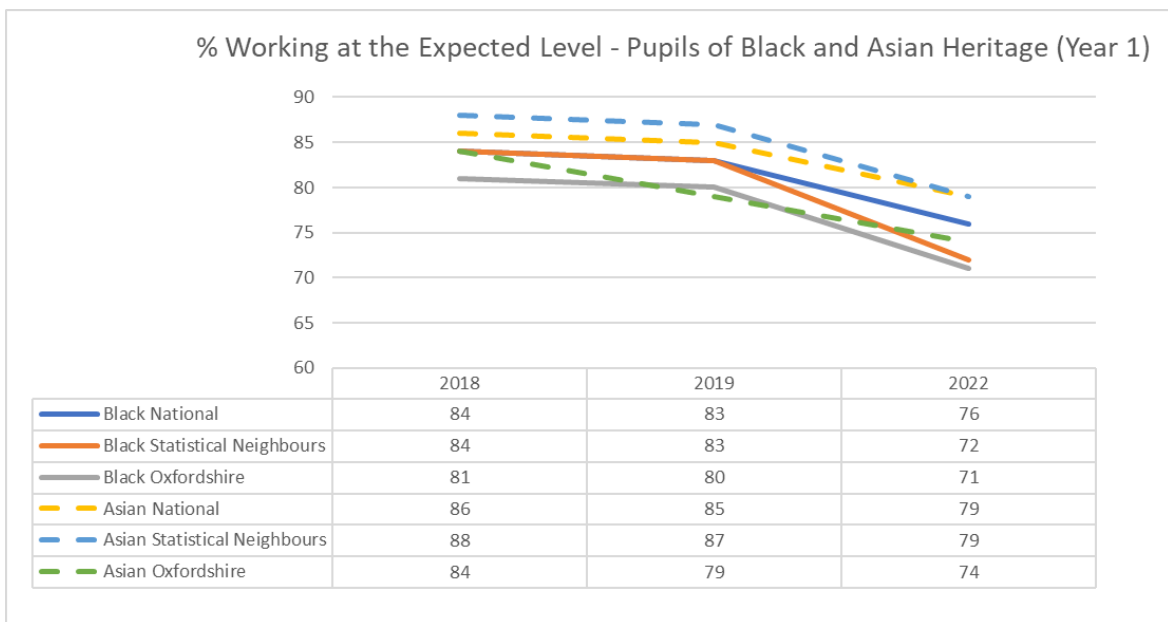


Figure 51: Percentage of pupils of Black heritage and Asian heritage working at the expected level in Year 1 phonics in 2022

By Year 2, the percentage of Black heritage pupils that met the expected standard was one percentage point below the national average in 2022 (see Figure 52).

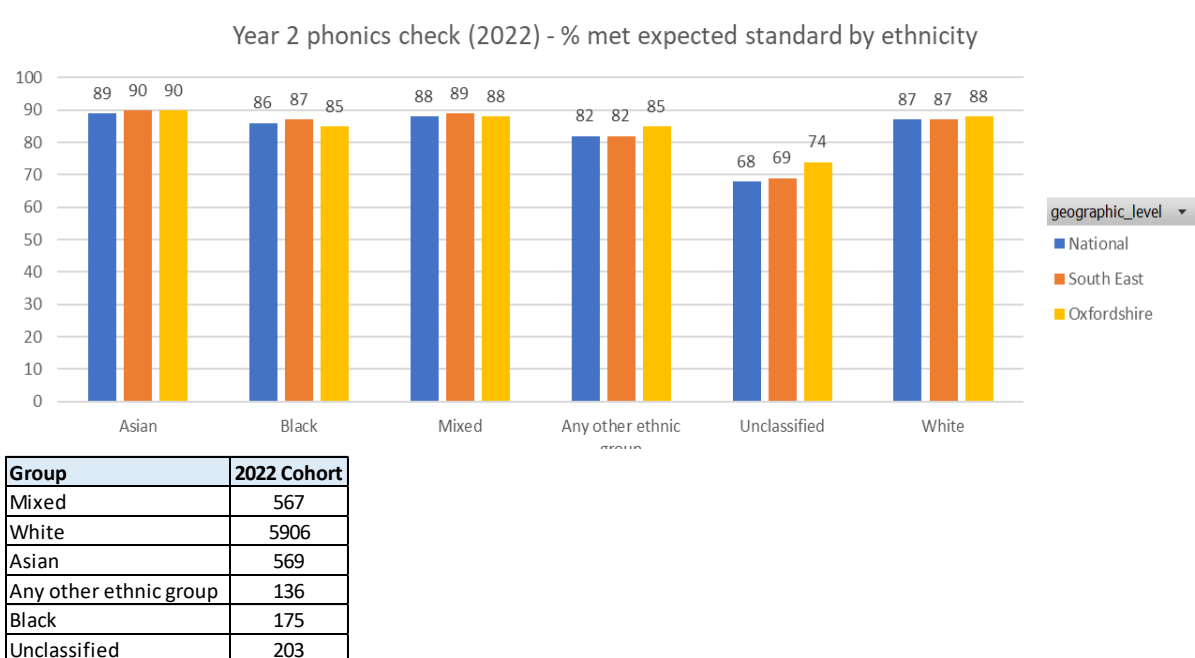
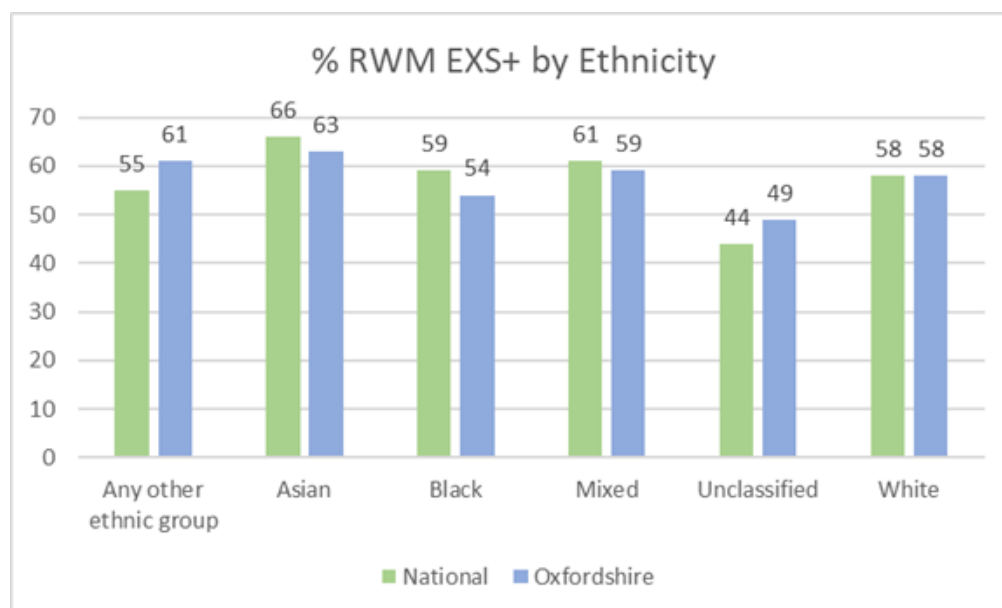


Figure 52: Percentage of pupils meeting the expected level in the Year 2 phonics check in 2022 by ethnicity

Key Stage 2

In 2022, the percentage of pupils of Black heritage achieving at least the expected standard in RWM in Oxfordshire was 54 per cent, five percentage points below the national figure of 59 per cent. The percentage of pupils of Asian heritage achieving at least the expected standard in RWM was 63 per cent compared to 66 per cent nationally. The percentage of pupils of Mixed heritage was 59 per cent compared to 61 per cent nationally (see Figure 53).



Group	2022 Cohort
Any other ethnic group	125
Asian	520
Black	216
Mixed	592
Unclassified	140
White	6280

Figure 53: Percentage of pupils achieving the expected standard in RWM at Key Stage 2 in 2022 by ethnicity

Key Stage 4

In 2022, within Oxfordshire, pupils from a White background achieved a higher Attainment 8 score than those nationally. Attainment 8 for pupils of Black heritage in Oxfordshire was in the bottom quartile nationally with only 16 LAs reporting a lower score for this pupil group. The Oxfordshire Attainment 8 score for this group is 4.3 points below national. The Oxfordshire cohort is made up of 208 pupils. Oxfordshire is also in the bottom quartile for Attainment 8 scores for pupils of Asian heritage. The Oxfordshire Attainment 8 score for this group is 4.0 points below the national average. The Oxfordshire cohort is made up of 368 pupils. The Attainment 8 score for pupils from a Mixed heritage background was also slightly lower in Oxfordshire than both the national and the South East

average. While the Attainment 8 score was highest for Chinese heritage pupils, the Attainment 8 score for this group was lower than both the national and South East Average (see Figure 54).

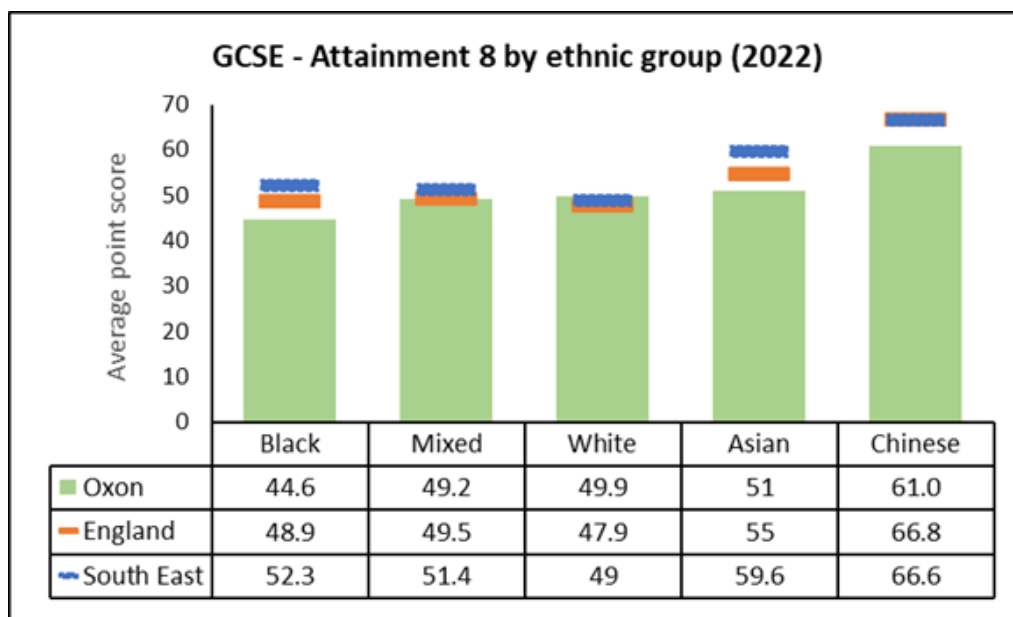
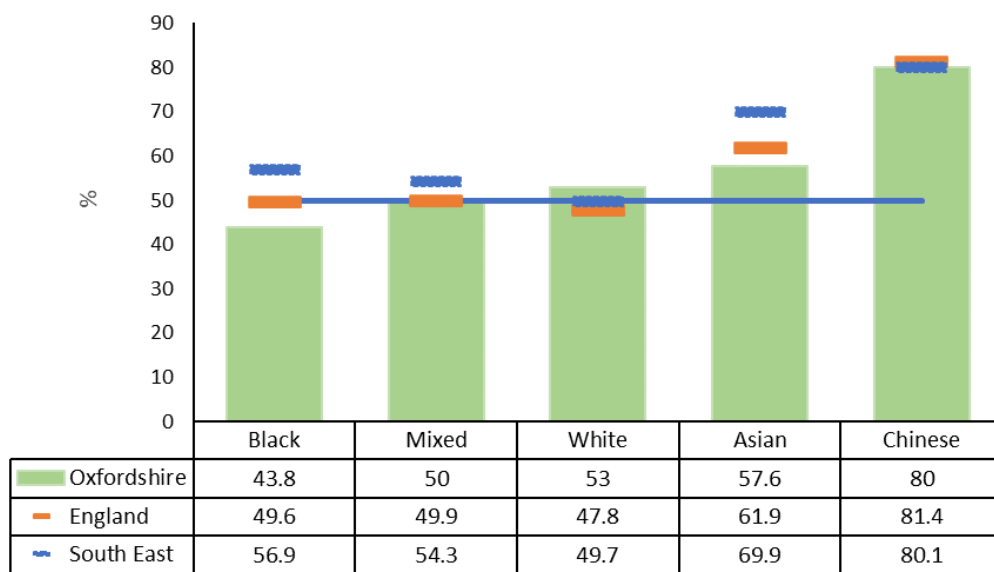


Figure 54: Attainment 8 score by ethnic group in 2022

Figure 55 shows that in Oxfordshire, pupils identifying as White had a higher Grade 5 – 9 English and maths percentage than the national average for White pupils. All other ethnic groups are below the national average for their comparative ethnic group, but aside from students of Black heritage they are still performing above the overall national average for all ethnicities (blue line in Figure 55). The reason for this is the large national cohort of White pupils reduces the national average.

GCSE - % pupils achieving Grades 5 - 9 English & Maths



The blue line depicts the national average (all ethnicities)

Group	2022 Cohort
Asian	368
Black	208
Chinese	15
Mixed	448
Other	116
Unclassified	164
White	5330

Figure 55: Percentage of pupils achieving grades 5 – 9 in English and mathematics in 2022 by ethnic group

Pupils of Black heritage rank 106th and pupils of Asian heritage rank 108th amongst all LAs (third quartile) whereas pupils from White backgrounds rank 34th amongst all LAs (top quartile).

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Divisions Affected - All

People Overview & Scrutiny Committee

02 October 2023

Area SEND inspection of Oxfordshire Local Area Partnership Report by the Interim Corporate Director for Children's Services

RECOMMENDATION

1. The Committee is **RECOMMENDED** to
 - (a) **NOTE** the report of His Majesty's Chief Inspector;
 - (b) **NOTE** the indicative action plan development process and proposed governance;
 - (c) **AGREE** any recommendations it wishes to make to Cabinet.

Executive Summary

2. The County Council is jointly responsible with the Buckinghamshire, Oxfordshire, and Berkshire West Integrated Care Board (BOB ICB) for the planning and commissioning of services for children and young people with SEND in Oxfordshire.
3. There was an inspection by the Care Quality Commission (CQC) and the Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted) between 13 July 2023 and 21 July 2023. The report was published on 15 September 2023.
4. The inspection's outcome was that "There are widespread and/or systemic failings leading to significant concerns about the experiences and outcomes of children and young people with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), which the local area partnership must address urgently".
5. The Council has unequivocally accepted the report as have partners.
6. Following publication of the report, His Majesty's Chief Inspector (HMCI) requires the local area partnership to prepare and submit a priority action plan (area SEND) to address the identified areas for priority action. Deadline for this submission is 27th October 2023.
7. The Priority Action Plan is being co-developed by the council and partners through 3 workshops, taking place within the next fortnight.

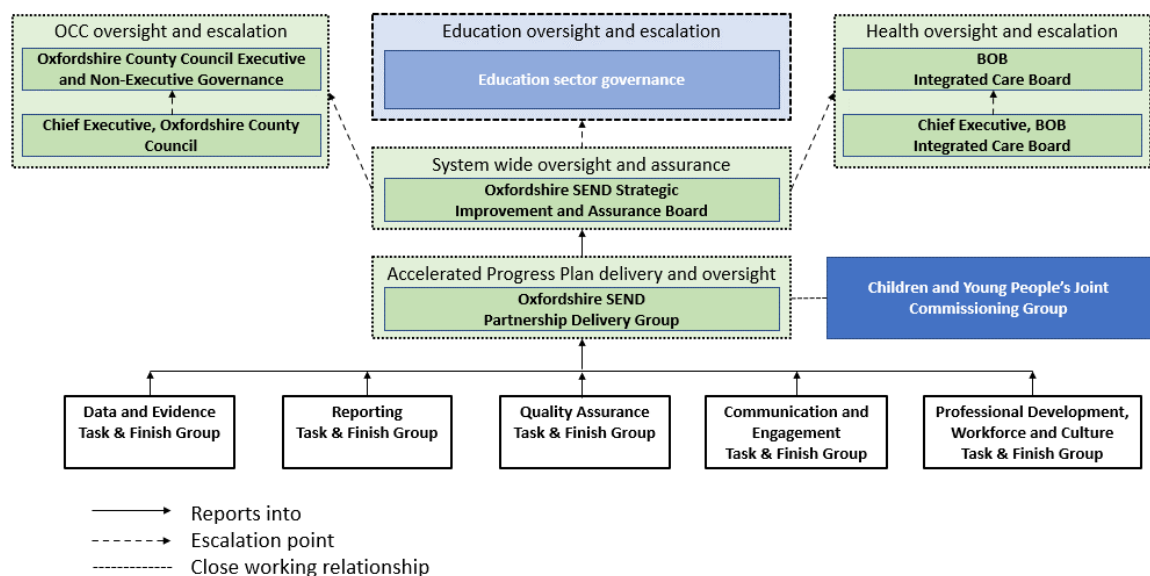
Report

Priority Action Plan

8. The Priority Action Plan (PAP) will be developed and signed off as below.
9. 3x partner agency workshops to be held on Monday 25th September, Thursday 28th September, and Tuesday 3rd October. At these workshops, partners will work together to develop an initial PAP, addressing the 5 priority actions and 4 areas for improvement identified in the inspection report. Workshop participants will be comprised of the Oxfordshire SEND Partnership Delivery Group (see 15/16 below), Oxfordshire Parents Carers Forum, Headteachers and Academy Trust representatives, and members of the Education Commission. This will ensure a collective partnership approach.
10. The draft PAP will be presented to the first meeting of the Oxfordshire SEND Strategic Improvement and Assurance Board (SIAB – see Governance and Monitoring below). This meeting will also ratify proposed governance arrangements and Terms of Reference for the SIAB.
11. The finalised PAP will be signed off by Stephen Chandler (OCC, Executive Director – People), Anne Coyle (Interim Corporate Director for Children’s Services), Nick Broughton (Chief Executive, Oxford Health), and Rachel Corsar (Chief Nursing Officer).

Governance and Monitoring

12. Proposed governance arrangements are below:



13. As per its Terms of Reference, the Oxfordshire SEND Strategic Improvement and Assurance Board (SIAB) will meet monthly (with a review after 6 months) to provide strategic system and partnership leadership, assurance, and oversight of the areas of weakness identified in the inspection, across the local

area system in Oxfordshire for children and young people with special education needs and disabilities (SEND) and their families.

14. The Board will provide oversight and assurance for the partnership delivery of the SEND Strategy, Action Plan, the Engagement and Participation Strategy and the SEND Communications and Engagement Strategies which contain additional and complementary work to the nine improvement priorities. The Independent Chair of the Board is accountable for reporting to the Department of Education and NHS England, progress against delivery of actions and outcomes within the Action Plan arising from the local area SEND inspection.
15. The Board will be supported by the Oxfordshire SEND Partnership Delivery Group (PDG) and, as necessary, any time limited Task and Finish Groups to respond to the areas of weakness. The SEND Partnership Delivery Group will take forward the co-ordination of partnership activity and monitor progress and impact of delivery in detail. It will liaise with OCC's Operational Groups who are responsible for local authority project delivery.
16. Membership of the SEND Partnership Delivery Group comprises staff from OCC, NHS Buckinghamshire, Oxfordshire & Berkshire West Integrated Care Board (BOB ICB), Oxford Health, Oxford University Hospitals, and Oxfordshire Parents Carers Forum. It will provide monthly assurance reports into the Board, and the SEND Strategic Improvement and Assurance Board Chair will meet with the Chair(s) of the SEND Partnership Delivery Group to ensure rapid tasking and clear accountability between the strategic and delivery assurance arrangements.
17. As per the Area SEND Inspections Framework, Ofsted and CQC will carry out a monitoring inspection around 18 months after the initial inspection. This will assess the extent to which the local area partners are taking effective action to address the areas for priority action set out in the inspection report, and the impact of actions on the weaknesses identified. These findings will be used to determine any further required intervention and/ or support (see <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/area-send-framework-and-handbook/area-send-inspections-framework-and-handbook>).

Corporate Policies and Priorities

18. The report and its recommendations relate explicitly to the following priorities: tackle inequalities in Oxfordshire; prioritise the health and wellbeing of residents; create opportunities for children and young people to reach their full potential.

Financial Implications

19. Consideration of the action plan will include assessment of the financial implications involved.

Comments checked by:

Lorna Baxter,
Director of Finance, lorna.baxter@oxfordshire.gov.uk

Legal Implications

20. Consideration of the action plan will include assessment of any legal implications involved.

Comments checked by:

Anita Bradley,
Director of Law and Governance, anita.bradley@oxfordshire.gov.uk

Staff Implications

21. Consideration of the action plan will include assessment of any staffing implications involved.

Equality & Inclusion Implications

22. Consideration of the action plan will include assessment of any equality and inclusion implications involved.

Anne Coyle
Interim Corporate Director for Children's Services
September 2023

Annex: Area SEND inspection of Oxfordshire Local Area Partnership

Area SEND inspection of Oxfordshire Local Area Partnership

Inspection dates: 13 to 21 July 2013

Dates of previous inspection: 14 to 17 October 2019

Inspection outcome

There are widespread and/or systemic failings leading to significant concerns about the experiences and outcomes of children and young people with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), which the local area partnership must address urgently.

A monitoring inspection will be carried out within approximately 18 months. The next full reinspection will be within approximately 3 years.

As a result of this inspection, HMCI requires the local area partnership to prepare and submit a priority action plan (area SEND) to address the identified areas for priority action.

Information about the local area partnership

Oxfordshire County Council and Buckinghamshire, Oxfordshire and Berkshire West Integrated Care Board (ICB) are jointly responsible for the planning and commissioning of services for children and young people with SEND in Oxfordshire.

The commissioning of health services changed across England in 2022. In Oxfordshire, the responsibility for health services passed from Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) to the Buckinghamshire, Oxfordshire and Berkshire West ICB on 1 July 2022. There have been more recent changes to some senior leadership posts in the local area partnership. These include the appointment of a new chief executive for the ICB and the recent appointment of an interim Director of Children's Services for Oxfordshire County Council, who has stepped up to this role since being in Oxfordshire since 2022.

Oxfordshire County Council commissions a range of alternative provision for children or young people, including for those who cannot attend school due to social, emotional, and mental health and medical needs, or for those who are at risk of or have been permanently excluded. Many of these places are commissioned at Meadowbrook College and the Oxfordshire Hospital School.

What is it like to be a child or young person with SEND in this area?

The experiences of children and young people in Oxfordshire depend on who they meet along their journey. If dedicated professionals recognise their needs early on, collaborate with others effectively and are then able to access the right support, they are one of the few whose needs are met. Sadly, this is too rare due to long-standing failings in local partnership arrangements. For most children, young people and their families, their experience is one of confusion and delay, alongside frustration that their presence and their voice are not listened to or valued. Consequently, many do not receive the right support or have their needs met effectively.

Conversely, children and young people who experience the pockets of stronger multi-agency working thrive. Where they encounter these dedicated practitioners, their quality of life is improved. As one young person commented, 'I now have a life worth living.' However, far too many children and young people are lost in the system. The processes that are intended to support them hinder them.

Children's and young people's needs are not consistently identified accurately or assessed in a timely and effective way right from the start. Where they are involved, early years settings, health visitors and school nurses do their best to identify and respond to emerging needs in babies, children and young people. However, there are lengthy waiting times for help and leaders have not acted effectively enough to ensure that appropriate support is available to mitigate the negative impact of excessive waiting times. While recent service changes are being implemented in some health teams, the impact of these changes are yet to be felt.

When families and professionals face an absence of early intervention, some feel the only way to get help is to secure support through an education, health and care (EHC) plan. Additionally, for those children and young people with an EHC plan, families too often report the need to intervene and advocate to secure provision in line with the plan for their child. This creates inequity in the system. Although the views of children, young people and their families are usually sought, they are not always listened to and acted on sufficiently well, for example when considering young people's views regarding how well their educational needs are being met.

Too many children and young people do not receive the right help until they are close to crisis point. This is hampered by the lack of cohesive communication systems between services across the partnership, which inhibits joined-up working. Poor information-sharing means that important knowledge of children, young people and their families is not connected across services efficiently and effectively.

In schools, staff are not always well supported to understand and meet the different needs of children and young people with SEND. Leaders know there is a lack of appropriate specialist settings and alternative provision (AP). This means that some children and young people are not able to get the right help quickly enough. At times, this contributes to the breakdown of placements, and leads to children and young people spending too much time out of school. Leaders recognise this and are planning a new

strategy to address these concerns.

Where children and young people receive support within specialist statutory teams, for example the Children's Disability Team, they receive timely assessment and appropriate advice to meet their needs. Here, practitioners effectively assess, review and support children and young people to achieve positive outcomes and experiences. For these children and young people, their transitions are well organised.

Children and young people who can access the right support and setting have their needs understood and met. This sets them up well for their future. For others, lengthy delays in finding the right setting to meet their needs means too many children and young people miss out on important learning and help for an extended time.

What is the area partnership doing that is effective?

- Recently appointed area leaders recognise the significant weaknesses of the current system and acknowledge the wide-ranging concerns found during the inspection.
- All agencies involved with looked after children with SEND have a sharp focus on working together to help them to achieve ambitious outcomes. This leads to effective monitoring and multi-agency work across the partnership for children living out of area. Their health, education and social care needs are prioritised. Consequently, their needs are better met and professionals work in partnership with parents and carers. Children are frequently seen by staff, including social workers, and their safety is prioritised.
- Early years practitioners get useful training and advice from the Early Years SEN Inclusion Team. They use the Early Years SEND toolkit to produce 'support and outcomes plans' that outline children's needs clearly. These plans guide practitioners to ensure that children work towards personalised outcomes one careful step at a time. This helps to prepare them for their next steps, if these are known and agreed.
- Where there is strong practitioner knowledge and expertise, children and young people benefit from cohesive, proactive planning for their needs. For example, families accessing the early help service benefit from plans that describe their needs well. The Learning Disabilities Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services team provides welcomed support and useful strategies to families and practitioners.
- The Oxfordshire Parent Carer Forum are committed to working with the local area partnership. They are well connected with training and workforce development initiatives and recently led on a well-received 'Moving into Adulthood' event alongside the partnership. Oxfordshire SENDIASS (SEND information advice and support service) is held in high regard by parents, carers and professionals. When they are able to access this, families receive helpful advice and training.
- Local area leaders acknowledge the lengthy waiting times for the neurodevelopmental conditions pathway. Children, young people and their families

are now being offered support while they are waiting for an appointment. Treatment and support are therefore moving towards a needs-led rather than diagnosis-led pathway.

- Many young people aged 18 to 25 who are known to adult social care receive effective assessment and intervention to meet their needs. Planning for transition is coordinated and avoids delays in meeting the needs of these young people into adulthood. This group receives professional support to participate in decision-making about their futures. Where professionals in further education settings know young people well, they help to support smooth transitions into young people's next steps.

What does the area partnership need to do better?

- Oxfordshire local area partnership has been characterised by frequent changes and interim arrangements in important roles within the SEND system. There is a disconnect between strategic thinking and operational practice which has contributed to a widespread lack of confidence in area leadership. This has negatively impacted the partnership's ability to undertake transformation and make sustainable change.
- Parent and carer confidence in the local area partnership to meet their children's needs is low. Around 2,000 parents and carers took time to share their views with inspectors. A tangible sense of helplessness runs through their descriptions of their lived experiences. These were typically about the years spent waiting or struggling to be heard to get support in education, health and care. Leaders openly acknowledge the urgent need for a 'reset' to repair the fractured relationships with parents and carers and other stakeholders.
- Agencies within the local area partnership do not work cohesively to ensure that children and young people get the right help at the right time. Although inspection activities supported multi-agency professionals to come together and understand more about children's and young people's needs, the absence of system-wide processes to support this collaboration on a day-to-day basis inhibits access to education, health and multi-agency services.
- The sufficiency of specialist provision is a significant area of concern. Too many children and young people are unable to access the education provision they need. Some wait for years. Despite their commitment to inclusion, some school leaders are unable to meet pupils' increasingly varied needs. This is due to a lack of suitable advice, guidance and support from specialists. Consequently, many school leaders and staff feel overwhelmed because they cannot support children and young people as well as they aspire to.
- Over time there has been little strategic oversight of AP. Area leaders do not know registered or unregistered providers well and relationships with commissioned providers have been notably weak. Area leaders, school leaders and AP leaders all have concerns about the effectiveness of the current system. Commissioning arrangements are unhelpful, and providers are concerned about delays in decision-making, including about transition arrangements.

- Many schools prioritise transition work. However, when there are delays to decision-making and naming suitable placements, this work is undone. Poor communication exacerbates this, adding to the feeling of helplessness expressed by many professionals, parents and carers. These delays impact planning and preparation for next steps.
- The timeliness of EHC plans has recently improved from the published 4% which are completed within the 20-week statutory time frame. EHC plans considered during the inspection rely heavily on education input. There is little inclusion of the contribution from health or social care. Internal quality assurance reviews are thorough and identify precisely where improvement is required. However, there has been no sharing of learning from this work. Therefore, this has not contributed to improving the quality of EHC plans. Frequently, EHC plans do not describe the child or young person accurately enough to ensure that their needs are met effectively, particularly at the point of transition.
- Co-production (a way of working where children, families and those that provide the services work together to create a decision or a service that works for them all) is undervalued across the partnership. Evidence indicates there is late-stage consultation rather than true co-production from the outset. Children’s and young people’s voices are not well heard or sought at the earliest opportunity. Parents and carers report communication both within and across the local area partnership as a significant challenge. They state that ‘parents are the last to know’, for example, if there are changes in professionals involved with the family.
- Children and young people with a high risk of admission for mental health concerns and/or placement breakdown are considered on the dynamic support register. All cases reviewed during the inspection demonstrated a lack of a multi-agency approach to meeting needs effectively.
- Commissioning does not always underpin the service provision needed in Oxfordshire. There is a lack of clarity in the planning and commissioning of services to meet the needs of children and young people. This leads to education and health services being unable to balance capacity and manifests in long waiting times for children and young people.
- Many service reviews and new projects are started. It is unclear if or when these are completed, or what the tangible outcomes are. As a result, parents and carers have lost faith in the area’s ability to deliver on promises that have been made for impactful positive change. Leaders continue to work in a context where they are endeavouring to establish stability in key roles in the SEND system.

Areas for priority action

Responsible body	Areas for priority action
Oxfordshire County Council and NHS Buckinghamshire, Oxfordshire, and Berkshire West ICB	Leaders in the local authority, ICB and education, health and care providers should urgently prioritise systems to gather the views of children and young people with SEND effectively. Leaders should use these views to inform their strategic planning for, and evaluation of,

	SEND services that improve the outcomes and experiences of children and young people with SEND and their families.
Oxfordshire County Council and NHS Buckinghamshire, Oxfordshire, and Berkshire West ICB	Leaders in the local authority, ICB and education, health and care providers should develop communication systems across the partnership to improve the efficiency and quality of their information-gathering processes to ensure that children's and young people's needs are understood and met effectively through coordinated approaches.
Oxfordshire County Council and NHS Buckinghamshire, Oxfordshire, and Berkshire West ICB	Leaders across the partnership should establish rigorous processes to help ensure the improved timeliness and quality assurance of EHC plans. Leaders should use this learning to improve the quality of new and existing EHC plans.
Oxfordshire County Council and NHS Buckinghamshire, Oxfordshire, and Berkshire West ICB	Leaders across education, health and care should improve the commissioning of services to ensure that children, young people and their families receive sufficient support to better meet their needs and improve parental confidence in the SEND system.
Oxfordshire County Council and NHS Buckinghamshire, Oxfordshire, and Berkshire West ICB	Leaders, including education, health and care providers, should identify the steps that they will take to collectively monitor and measure the impact of their strategy and actions. These plans should be co-produced with and communicated clearly to children, young people and their families so that their experiences and outcomes improve.

Areas for improvement

Areas for improvement
The local area partnership should evaluate the quality and impact of services and joint working more effectively in order to inform improvements that lead to better outcomes and experiences for children and young people with SEND.
Leaders should improve their strategic approach to transition planning at all ages so that children and young people receive the right help and support they need to lead successful lives.
Leaders must continue to develop their oversight, strategy and commissioning arrangements of suitable alternative provision so that there is sufficient suitable provision that meets the needs of children and young people with SEND.
Leaders across the partnership should continue to address the long waiting times for children and young people requesting support from health services. The local area partnership should ensure that support is in place from health services for children and young people who are awaiting assessments.

Local area partnership details

Local Authority	Integrated Care Board
Oxfordshire County Council	NHS Buckinghamshire, Oxfordshire, and Berkshire West
Anne Coyle, Director of Children's Services	Nick Broughton, Chief Executive Officer
www.oxfordshire.gov.uk	www.bucksoxonberksw.icb.nhs.uk
County Hall New Road Oxford OX1 1ND	Buckinghamshire, Oxfordshire, Berkshire West ICB Sandford Gate Sandy Lane West Oxford OX4 6LB

Information about this inspection

This inspection was carried out at the request of the Secretary of State for Education under section 20(1)(a) of the Children Act 2004.

The inspection was led by one of His Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) from Ofsted, with a team of inspectors, including: one of His Majesty's Inspectors and an Ofsted Inspector from education and social care; a lead Children's Services Inspector from Care Quality Commission (CQC); and another Children's Services Inspector from the CQC.

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