

The Maximilian

A monthly newsletter for governors within the Archdiocese of Southwark

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A Level Results

As was widely forecast before their publication, the proportion of A* and A grades dropped from 35.9% last year to 26.5% in 2023 as grading standards returned to pre-pandemic standards. The level achieved was, however, still slightly above 25.2% in 2019. As a reminder, pupils were awarded centre-assessed grades in 2020 and teacher-assessed grades in 2021

This year, 75.4% of grades achieved were C and above, down on 82.1% last year and slightly below 75.5% in 2019.

The number of students achieving 3 A* grades has dropped by more than half this year – from 8,570 to 3,820. Whilst still above pre-pandemic 2019 – when 2,785 pupils achieved it – but significantly down on the 12,975 pupils achieving 3 A*s in 2021, when teacher grades were awarded.

Whilst grading has mostly returned to pre-pandemic standards at a national level, the regional picture has changed, possibly signalling the impact of covid on children regionally. In 2019, 23% of grades in the north east were A/A* but this was 22% in 2023, meaning the region is now the lowest attaining in the country. Compare this to London where 30% were top grades this year compared to 26.9% in 2019.

There were fears that grade declines would result in more students missing offers for university or college. However, UCAS data shows that 79% of 18-year-olds in the UK secured their first-choice plan, compared to 81% in 2022 and 74% in 2019.

GCSE Results

GCSE results for 2023, the second set of figures since examinations resumed post the pandemic, for pupils in England found:

- The grade 5-pass rate (a “strong” pass) has dropped from 60.3% in 2022 to 54.4% this year. However, this is still slightly above the 53.5% in 2019.
- The number of grades that are 4 and above is 70.3% which is down from 75.3% in 2022. Again, it is marginally above the 69.9% pass rate in 2019.



- The proportion of top grades (7 to 9) fell 17% this year. In 2023, 22.4% of grades were 7 and above, compared to 27% last year. It's now closer to the pre-pandemic proportion of 21.8%.
- The proportion of top grades (9) has fallen from 6.8% in 2022 to 5% this year, much closer to the 4.7% seen in 2019.
- The proportion of top grades in English has fallen 20% since last year; in maths, the fall was 12.1%.
- The grade 5-pass rate for English was 55.1% compared to 61.1% in 2022 and 53.4% in 2019. The grade 5 pass rate for maths was 52.4%, down from 56.6% in 2022 but up on 50.1% in 2019.
- More than 167,000 students in England received grade 3 or lower on their maths paper, about 21,000 more than in 2022, while 172,000, failed English language, the highest number in a decade. Last year, only 20% of those retaking their maths GCSEs passed. Head teachers' unions have said this will put more pressure on colleges as students require at least a grade 4 in English and maths in order to qualify for further study.
- Girls continue to outperform boys when it comes to top grades, though the gap is smaller this year than in 2022. This year, 25.3% of grades issued to 16-year-old girls in England were 7s and above, compared to 19.5% of those issued to boys, a gap of 5.8 percentage points. Last year, the figures were 30.7% for girls and 23.3% for boys, a gap of 7.4 percentage points.
- The gap in top grades between the north east and London has widened from 9.3 percentage points in 2019 to 10.8 percentage points this year. It has been widening gradually during the pandemic.
- The proportion of top grades in the north east was 17.6% this year compared to 16.4% pre-pandemic. This compares to 28.4% this year in London, up from 25.7% in 2019. The north east has also seen the largest percentage drop in top grades since 2022 – a fall of 21.4%. The smallest drop was in London, 12.9%.

SATs Results

Key Stage 2 headline results, which can be accessed [here](#), have been published and highlight that:

- Attainment in reading, writing and maths combined remained the same as in 2022, with 59% of pupils reaching the expected standard.
- In reading, 73% of pupils met the expected standard, down from 75% in 2022.
- In maths, 73% of pupils met the expected standard, up from 71% in 2022.
- In writing, 71% of pupils met the expected standard, up from 69% in 2022.
- In grammar, punctuation and spelling, 72% of pupils met the expected standard, unchanged from 2022.
- In science, 80% of pupils met the expected standard, up from 79% in 2022.

Due to the pandemic, it was expected that there would be lower levels of attainment compared to 2019, while children caught up on lost learning. Whilst the combined expected standard (59%) was in line with 2022, it fell from the 2019 when 65% of pupils reached the expected standard.

The DfE point to the increased attainment in maths and writing from last year, coupled with standards in reading reflecting pre-pandemic levels, as indications that progress has been made in recovering from the pandemic.

Given the national media interest in this year's reading test, the School's Minister, Nick Gibb, asked the STA for their assessment of the relative difficulty of the test. Based on evidence gathered throughout the test development process, STA confirmed that the content of this year's test was at the appropriate level of difficulty.



In recognition of the educational importance of reading for students, the DfE will also be launching a new and updated Reading Framework. This is an update to [existing guidance](#) published July 2021, which previously only related to the teaching of reading in Reception and Year 1. This updated guidance has been expanded from reception and Key Stage 1 to cover Key Stage 2 and 3 to help schools improve reading for all pupils so they leave primary able to engage confidently and passionately with reading in all subjects at secondary school. It provides guidance to teachers in Key Stage 2 and secondary schools on how to support those pupils who still need help with reading.

In addition to this framework, the Government will also be launching a review of good practice in the teaching of writing to look at how best to improve attainment in writing. Watch this space!

[Updated guidance](#) on primary accountability measures has confirmed that data on primary pupil progress in 2024 or 2025 will not be published because there are no Key Stage 1 SATs results to provide a baseline. The DfE intend to return to producing progress measures using KS1 assessments in 2025/26 and 2026/27, ahead of the Reception Baseline Assessment progress measures from 2027/28.

Keeping Children Safe in Education

Keeping Children Safe in Education 2023 (accessed here) and updated statutory exclusions guidance ([accessed here](#)) came into effect from the 1st September 2023. As a reminder:

- The key change to KCSiE 2023 focuses on internet filtering and monitoring – standards for filtering and monitoring have been published by the DfE;
- The exclusions guidance has been updated with respect to the headteacher's ability to cancel an exclusion before it has been considered by the Governing Board; and
- Both in-school exclusion/suspension Governor Panel Hearings and Independent Panel Review Hearings can now be heard virtually rather than in person, as long as this has been requested by the parents and certain criteria has been met for a virtual hearing to take place.

Ofsted Updates

New Ofsted Chief Inspector

Sir Martyn Oliver, the CEO of Outwood Grange Academies Trust, has vowed to work "closely with the whole sector" to "create the best system" for children after being confirmed as the DfE's preferred candidate for Ofsted Chief Inspector.

He will now appear before the Education Committee in September; if approved, he will begin his initial five-year term on 1st January 2024.

Sir Martyn Oliver had been the frontrunner for the role alongside fellow Trust boss, Sir Ian Bauckham. However, his appointment could be controversial. Whilst OGAT is one of country's most successful turnaround trusts, with many of the schools it takes on in deprived areas, OGAT's zero-tolerance approach has been criticised - from its schools' high exclusion rates to facing a legal challenge over its use of isolation booths. One OGAT pupil has claimed they had spent almost a third of their time at school in isolation. Sir Martyn also sat on the Government commission on race which was widely criticised for underplaying racism.



Inspection Handbooks

The Inspection Handbooks have been updated for the new academic year. The changes include:

- a new 'conduct during inspection' section for Ofsted inspectors;
- confirmation of the likely date of the next inspection for schools;
- confirmation that inspectors will protect the anonymity of individuals when drawing on evidence;
- clarification that evidence from pupils, parents and staff will always be considered in a proportionate way, alongside other evidence gathered by inspectors;
- updates to the 'behaviour' and 'attendance' sections;
- clarity about what Ofsted means by 'capacity to improve' and 'culture of safeguarding';
- a new section on schools raising concerns;
- clarification that in trusts of over 40 schools the Chair of the Board of Trustees may delegate some meetings (no more than half) to another Trustee; and
- clarification regarding the DfE's minimum expectation of at least 32.5 hours for the length of the school week (that is has now been ushered back one year to September 2024).

Ofsted have also included new definitions that clarify the following:

- what is meant by the terms 'school', 'maintained school' and 'academy';
- what is meant by the terms 'board of governors', 'governors', 'board of trustees' and 'trustees';
- what is meant by the terms 'leaders' and 'trust leaders'

The September 2023 Inspection Handbook can be accessed [here](#) and the summary of changes can be [accessed here](#).

Complaints to Ofsted

Complaints to Ofsted about schools rose by a quarter last year, but more than two-thirds were deemed not to warrant further investigation. According to its annual report, Ofsted received 14,900 complaints about schools this year. The increase comes amid reports from schools that they themselves are facing a rise in parental complaints post Covid. One Academy Trust has previously estimated the volume of complaints from parents this year to be two or three times 2019 levels.

Its Chief Executive explained that whilst parents used to "go up to a teacher to complain...Now they skip that stage and go direct to thermo-nuclear war, an email to Ofsted, copy in the MP, for things that wouldn't have met the threshold before".

Less than 1% of the complaints received by Ofsted led to follow-up inspections. Ofsted's National Director for Education, Chris Russell, acknowledges that whilst parents should be able to complain to Ofsted if they've gone through their school's internal process and not found a resolution, there is a perception that the increase in complaints is prompting more snap inspections.

Of the complaints received this year, just 16% qualified for investigation, meaning they raised serious, whole-school issues. Ofsted will then either conduct a snap inspection or take the issues into account at the school's next inspection.

The majority of the complaints received are about leadership and management of a school or pupils' wellbeing. Most qualifying complaints (2,240) this year also contained safeguarding matters.



This year marked a big rise in complaints. There were 10,300 about schools from April 2019, to March 2020, 45% lower than this year. In 2018-19, a total of 12,200 complaints were made to Ofsted about schools. In both years, again less than 1% of complaints led to snap inspections being conducted.

Inspection Deep Dives

New Ofsted data reveals that English, maths and history are among the most common subjects for Ofsted deep dives during school inspections. Music, computing and design and technology were among the least likely to be scrutinised by Inspectors.

Under the Education Inspection Framework, which places a greater focus on curriculum, Inspectors carry out 'deep dives' into a sample of subjects to interrogate a school's curriculum. This will involve gathering evidence on curriculum intent, implementation and impact through talking to leaders, conducting visits to lessons and looking at pupils' work.

In primary settings:

- As set out in the school inspection handbook, Inspectors must look at reading in all primary school inspections.
- Besides reading, the most common subjects for deep dives were maths (97% of inspections), history (46%), geography (27%) and science (23%).

Just 3% per cent of inspections saw Inspectors conduct deep dives in French, Spanish or German.

In secondary settings:

- The picture is broadly similar with English the most common subject for deep dives (86% of inspections).
- Maths (77%), science (60%), history (55%) and, this time, languages (51%) followed.
- The least likely subject to be investigated was RE at just 5% of inspections. Computing (7%), music (8%) and design and technology (18%) were also among the least common subjects for deep dives during secondary inspections.

Ofsted points out that its inspectors were somewhat restricted in their capacity to scrutinise RE in some schools; the Education Act sets out that the watchdog cannot inspect the subject in voluntary-aided maintained schools with a religious character or academies that were formerly voluntary-aided schools with a religious character.

This year, the average number of deep dives carried out by inspectors per inspection was four for primaries and five for secondary schools. Special schools and alternative provision are not included within this data.

Academy Updates

Academy Trust Handbook 2023

The end of the summer term saw the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) publish the [Academy Trust Handbook 2023](#), which came into effect on the 1st September 2023.

The ESFA has worked closely with a range of trusts and sector bodies to ensure that the financial oversight framework within the Handbook remains easily understood and straight forward to use and



reflects the development and maturity of the academy sector. As a result, the 2023 Handbook is a considerably shorter and sharper document, removing what the ESFA refers to as unnecessary detail and prescription. The main changes include:

- **Related Party Transactions:** the threshold for the ESFA's prior approval for RTPs has been increased from £20K to £40K.
- **Annual Reporting:** Trustees are no longer required to provide an explanation in their governance statement within the Trust's audited annual accounts if they have held fewer than six Board meetings within the year. That said, the ESFA is keen to highlight that this is no way reduces the ESFA's expectation that Trusts have regular and effective Board meetings.
- **Budget Setting:** Trusts have now been provided with an additional month to submit their annual Budget Forecast Return (BFR), with the deadline now the end of August.
- **Budget Monitoring:** More discretion has been provided with respect to the distribution of a Trust's management accounts. Whilst the management accounts must still be shared with the Chair of Trustees each month, there is no longer the requirement for the other Trustees to consider the management accounts six times a year. Instead, from 2023 onwards, the ATH simply states that the Board must consider these when it meets.

A full list of the changes for 2023 can be found on [page 7 of the handbook](#).

There are a very small number of places where the 2023 Handbook more strongly emphasises Trusts' existing responsibilities, most notably the critical importance in ensuring the ongoing safety of the Trust's school estate. Whilst there are no new requirements in relation to estates, the Handbook emphasises and explains the existing responsibilities

Alongside the complete Handbook, the ESFA has also published a Schedule of Musts, collating all of the Handbook's requirements as a checklist for Trusts to use. Whilst not a substitute for the Handbook itself, the tool is hoped to be another small step in making Trusts' life simpler. The tool is an entirely optional resource, and there is no requirement to submit this to the ESFA.

Moving forward, the ESFA is considering:

- what can be done to improve and streamline the financial returns which Trusts are required to submit;
- how best to develop the ESFA's suite of financial management good practice guides as a means of maximising support without setting additional requirements; and
- improving the joining-up of information from the DfE and ESFA with respect to funding and finance.

Permanent Exclusions

The latest data on suspensions and permanent exclusions was published at the start of the summer and covers the 2021-22 academic year. Key findings include:

- There were 6,500 permanent exclusions in the 2021-22 academic year. Although an increase from 3,900 in 2020-21, the comparative year did include a period in the Spring term when schools were only open to key worker and vulnerable children. The number of permanent



exclusions was lower than the last full academic year before the pandemic (7,900 in 2018-19).

- The 2021-22 figures are the equivalent of 8 permanent exclusions for every 10,000 pupils.
- There were 578,300 suspensions in the 2021- 22 academic year. Again, this is an increase from the prior year, when 352,500 suspensions occurred, and is also higher than pre-pandemic levels (438,300 in 2018-19).
- The 2021-22 figures are the equivalent of 691 suspensions per 10,000 pupils.
- Persistent disruptive behaviour, 47% of permanent exclusions and 50% of suspensions, was the most common reason for the sanction being issued.

Further details can be [found here](#)

Cyber Security

Given the increase in recent cyber security incidents, the Education and Skills Funding Agency is reminding educational settings of the importance of “good cyber security hygiene”. For extra protection, schools/Trusts should:

- ensure that all staff are following password policies;
- stay vigilant against [phishing emails](#)
- familiarise themselves with the [department’s Cyber Standards](#) and NCSC’s [infographic](#)

The ESFA has also updated the [ESFA cyber crime and cyber security guidance](#) on GOV.UK.

Uniform Guidance

[Statutory guidance](#) came into force September 2022 to ensure school uniform costs were “reasonable” and secured “the best value for money”. A poll by The Children’s Society appeared to suggest the Government rules have had little impact. More than one-in-10 school leaders said, in a Government survey, that they were not aware of the guidance. Of the 87% who were aware of it, 50% knew very little of the guidance.

Just under two-thirds (62%) of school leaders said their school was fully compliant with the rules.

Under the guidance, schools must ensure arrangements are in place so second-hand uniforms are available, such as through swap shops.

Changes to Admissions Arrangements

As you may be aware, changes have been made to the guidance on school admissions. The key changes are around how Catholic practice is evidenced. The diocese have moved away from a Supplementary Information Form and moved to a diocesan Certificate of Practice. The purpose of this is to achieve greater consistency across the diocese. Under the new arrangements schools that are not or have no realistic possibility of being oversubscribed may drop this particular criterion and evidence Catholic applicants by way of a baptism certificate. This is intended to reflect the current situation in the diocese, with particular regard to falling pupil numbers. Copies of these documents were sent to headteachers, chairs of governors and parish priests, last month.

Please [click here](#) to view the documents. For further information please email [Daniel Coleman](#).



Courses & Events

Introduction to a MAT for Governors and Headteachers

Tuesday 7th November 2023 5.30pm-7pm

Free, Zoom

[Book](#)

Employee Procedures and Hearings – The role of the governors

Tuesday 14th November 2023 5.30pm-7pm

Free, Zoom

[Book](#)

Admissions, Place Planning and Marketing for Governors

Wednesday 15th November 2023 6pm-8pm

Free, Zoom

[Book](#)

Considering Becoming a Foundation Governor or Foundation Director? Your Questions Answered

Tuesday 21st November 2023 6pm-7pm

Free, Zoom

[Book](#)

Governors Conference

Saturday 25th November 2023 9.30am-3.45pm

£25, St Fidelis Catholic Primary School, Bexley Road, Erith, DA8 3HQ

[Book](#)

Considering Becoming a Foundation Governor or Foundation Director? Your Questions Answered

Wednesday 29th November 2023 4pm-5pm

Free, Zoom

[Book](#)

[This page](#) contains the dates and links to book onto the next series of sessions on Considering becoming a Foundation Governor or Foundation Director. This page also contains 2 A4 posters that can be used to encourage practising Catholics to become foundation governors or directors.

