

Start Well

Education

Introduction

Education and achievement are key determinants of health and opportunities throughout an individual's lifetime. Participating in school and education allows children and young people to access essential services such as specialist therapy services for children with educational needs and disability, to promote social development, and to improve health outcomes and reduce the risk of substance misuse and long-term health conditions in adulthood such as poor mental health¹.

This sub-chapter covers topics including school readiness, school attendance and attainment, special educational needs and disabilities. This sub-chapter does not cover pupil mental health as this is covered in the Start Well Mental Health sub-chapter.

School Readiness

School readiness at age five has a strong impact on future educational attainment and life chances. Children who do not achieve a 'good level of development' (GLD) at age five may struggle with social skills, reading, maths and physical skills. This can later impact on educational outcomes and health and well-being. Key groups most at risk of not achieving their educational and health outcomes include children from families eligible for Free School Meals (FSM), children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND), Children living in most disadvantaged communities and Looked After Children (LAC).

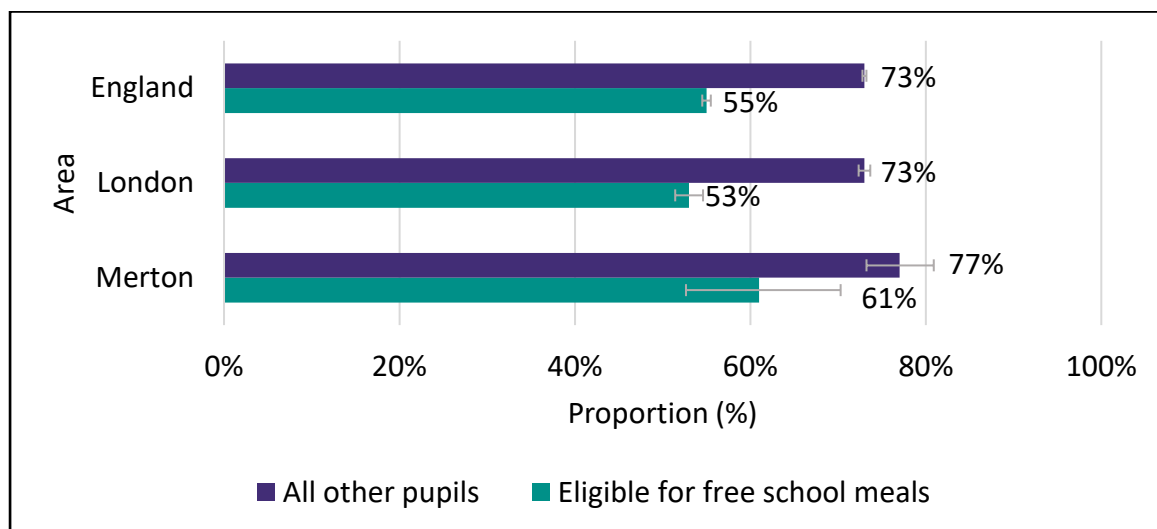
Overall, based on pre-pandemic data (2018/19) school readiness, achievement, and learning development has been continuously improving in Merton since 2012/13 for children in Reception, and from 2016/17 for those in Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2, with Merton outperforming the England average at all stages². With disruptions to education during the COVID-19 pandemic, nationally conducted interviews by Ofsted with providers of early year services have identified areas of key learning which have been missed by those in their early years and are therefore having to be taught behind schedule or revisited, for example development in mathematics and communication³. Early interim data for 2021/22 indicates that both nationally and locally there may have been more than 6% reduction in children achieving a good level of development up to age 5 years⁴. These indicators will have to be closely monitored in Merton to ensure school readiness and achievement continue to improve.

Children aged up to 5 years old achieving at least the expected level in the early learning goals within the three prime areas of learning (personal, social and emotional development; physical development; communication and language) as well as within literacy and mathematics is classed as achieving a 'good level of development'. In Merton 2018/19, 75.5% of children achieved a good level of development in the early years, this is higher than England and similar to outer London and is a significant and continuous increase from 2012/13 when the proportion in Merton was 46%. However, recent data for 2021/22 shows

that the proportion of children achieving a good level of development in Merton has decreased to 69% following the pandemic⁵.

Children from poorer backgrounds are more at risk of poorer development and the evidence shows that differences by social background emerge early in life⁶. Across Merton, London, and England, those eligible for free school meals are more likely to underperform in comparison to all other pupils. For example, in Merton 2019 (Figure 1), 61% of children receiving free school meals achieved the expected standard in all early learning goals, significantly lower compared to 77% among their peers who did not receive free school meals; this is a gap of 16%, however compares to a gap of 20% for London ⁷.

Figure 1: The percentage (%) of children in Merton achieving at least the expected standard in all early learning goals by free school meal eligibility, 2019. Source: GLA Datastore, Early Years Foundation Stage Profile Assessment Results, 2021⁸.



Early Learning Goals are a key measure of early years development across a wide range of developmental areas. In Merton 2018/19, 83.4% of children achieved expected level of development in phonics in Year 1, this is similar to both London (84.2%) and England (81.8%)⁹. The proportion achieving expected levels of development in Merton has been increasing over time, from 56.6% in 2011/12. The number of children reaching these expected levels is lower for those receiving free school meals, at 72.4% in Merton, 2018/19.¹⁰

In Merton 2018/19, the proportion of children achieving at least the expected level of development in communication, language, and literacy skills at the end of reception was 76.7%, similar to London (74.8%) but higher than England (72.6%). This value has consistently been increasing in Merton since 2012/13 (51.3%)¹¹. The proportion of children reaching these expected levels are significantly lower for males at 71.0%, in comparison to females at 82.8% ¹². Recent concerns have been raised nationally and locally by providers of early year services due to children falling behind in key areas of learning such as communication skills following the COVID pandemic lockdowns¹³.

School Attainment

Children's education is an important determinant of health and ensures that children develop the knowledge, skills and attributes they need for mental, emotional, social and physical wellbeing throughout life. Good educational attainment provides young people with the foundations required to access good employment, live and work in safe and healthy environments and afford a good quality of life.

Merton has 44 state funded primary schools with 17,231 students, 9 state funded secondary schools with 10,253 students, 3 state-funded special schools with 439 students, 1 pupil referral unit with 49 students, and 17 independent schools with 4,597 students (2020/21)¹⁴. As of 10th October 2020/21, 14 of these schools have been awarded an 'Outstanding' Ofsted rating while 39 have received a 'Good'¹⁵.

The proportion of Key stage 2 pupils in Merton (2018/19) achieving the expected standard of reading, writing and maths is 69%, this is similar to London (71%) and higher than England (65%).¹⁶ In Merton 2019, the average achievement across those reaching expected standards in reading, writing, or mathematics was 66% for those eligible for free school meals. To compare the average across those not eligible was 83%¹⁷. This trend is similarly seen across both London and England.

Provisional data for 2021/22 shows the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on key stage 2 achievement. For example, data for Merton shows a decrease in the proportion of pupils achieving the expected standard in reading, writing, and maths from 69% in 2018/19 to 62% in 2021/22. This trend is similarly seen across both London from 71% to 65%, and England from 65% to 58%¹⁸.

The disadvantage gap index at Key stage 2 shows the attainment gap between disadvantage pupils and all other pupils; a gap index of 0 would mean pupils from a disadvantaged background perform as well as those who are not disadvantaged, whereas the maximum value of 10 would represent the opposite¹⁹. Following the pandemic, the national disadvantage gap index has increased from 2.91 in 2018/19 to 3.21 in 2021/22²⁰.

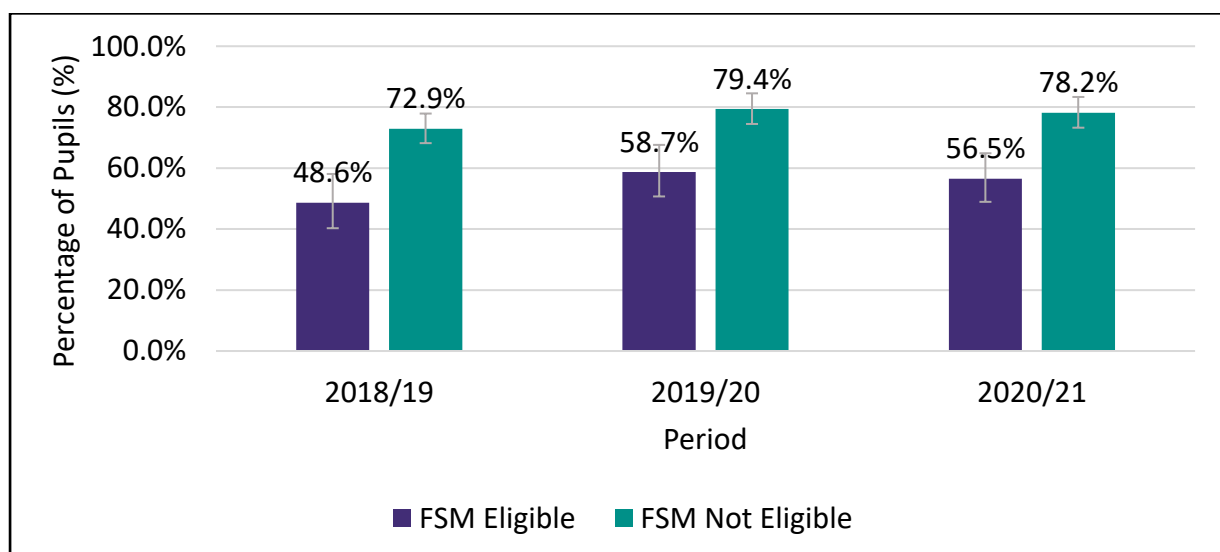
The proportion of Key stage 4 pupils in Merton (2020/21) achieving 5 GCSE's at grade 4 or higher including English and maths is 73.2%, to compare this is similar to both London (75.6%) and England (72.2%)²¹. Figure 2 below shows that compared to neighbouring boroughs, Merton was similar to Wandsworth (74.6%) and Croydon (70.4%), but lower than Sutton (84.8%), Kingston (84.5%) and Richmond (83.8%).

Figure 2: Percentage (%) of pupils who achieved a standard GCSE 9-4 pass for Maths and English between South West London boroughs, including a London and England comparison, 2020/21. Source: GLA Datastore, GCSE Results by Borough²².



In Merton 2020/21, the proportion of pupils achieving grades 4 or above in their English and Mathematics GCSE was 56.5% for those who are FSM eligible and 78.2% for those who are non-FSM eligible (Figure 3)²³. Nationally, pupils who receive free school meals have lower attainment on average than those who do not, and this is also the case for Merton²⁴.

Figure 3: The proportion (%) of pupils in Merton 2018/19 to 2020/21 achieving grades 4 or above in their English and Mathematic GCSE by free school meal eligibility. Department for Education, Explore Education Statistics²⁵.



School Attendance

Poor attendance is associated with lower levels of achievement and an increased risk of crime involvement, poorer mental health outcomes and social exclusion²⁶. In Merton 2020/21, 1,612,232 'sessions' were missed by pupils due to COVID circumstances (e.g. positive COVID test), accounting for 19.6% of all sessions conducted in 2020/21. The school day is made up of 2 sessions so a total of 806,116 days learning were missed due to the pandemic²⁷.

Persistent absentees are pupils who have missed 10% or more of their scheduled school sessions. In Merton 2020/21, there were 2,589 persistent absentees, this makes up 11.0% of children enrolled in Merton schools, similar to London (11.5%) and lower than England (12.1%). This is an increase in Merton of 2.3% from 2018/19, when there were 2,036 persistent absentees reported in Merton was 2,036 accounting for 8.7% of pupils²⁸. This increase in absences between 2018/19 and 2020/21 is expected to be due to safety concerns following the COVID-19 pandemic from both parents and young people, including the potentially increased levels of anxiety amongst school pupils²⁹.

Persistent absence increases through the school years, for example, during 2020/21 the proportion of persistent absentees within Merton primary schools was 8.3%, compared to 13.0% for secondary school pupils³⁰. Additionally, the number of pupils in Merton 2020/21, who had missed at least 50% of their scheduled sessions was 197 (0.84%), an increase from 80 pupils (0.34%) in 2018/19.

National data (2018/19) shows the proportion of persistent absentees within secondary schools in England differs between deprivation deciles, with those from the most deprived decile having significantly higher persistent absentees at 15.3% compared to those from the least deprived decile a 12.5% (IMD2019)³¹.

In Merton (2018/19), the proportion of fixed and permanent school exclusions was 2.88%, which is significantly lower than both London (3.90%) and England (5.45%)³². The proportion of 16-17 year olds not in education, employment, or training (NEET) or whose activity is not known in Merton, 2020, was 2.5%, this is significantly lower than both London (4.0%) and England (5.5%)³³.

During the pandemic the majority of pupils were educated remotely and children from poorer backgrounds were likely to have been disproportionately impacted, being less likely to have sufficient equipment and space to study than those from more affluent backgrounds³⁴.

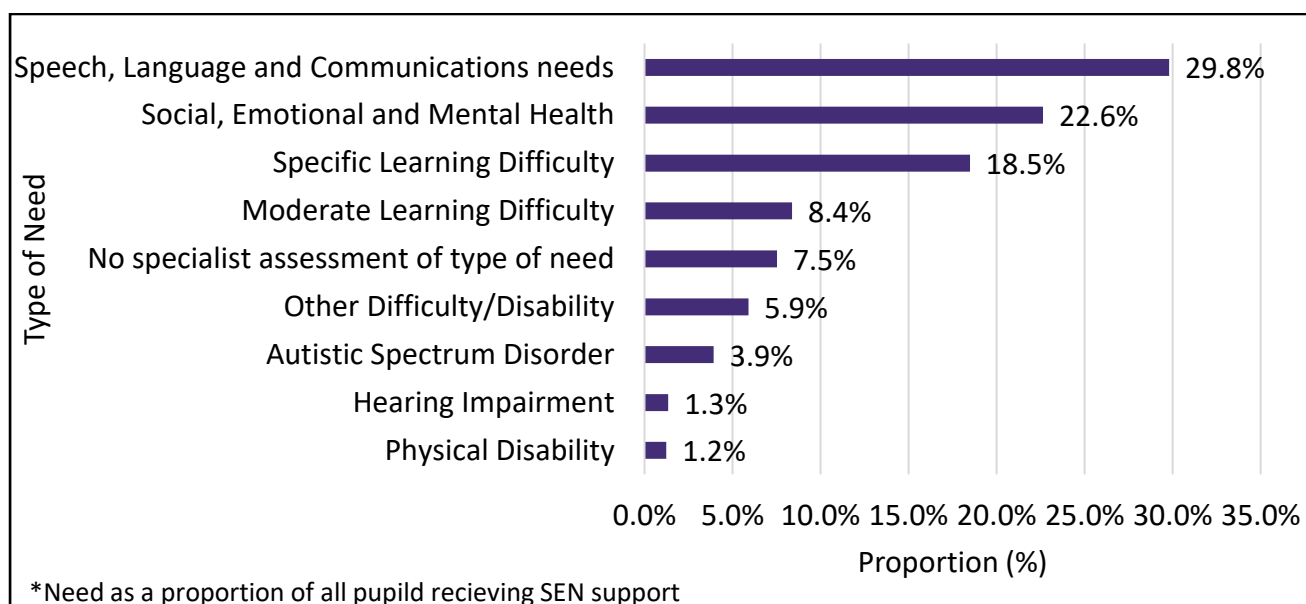
There has been an increase in children being electively home educated. A national survey conducted by the Association of Directors of Children's Services in 2021 found around a 7% increase in the number of children and young people electively home educated from 2020, they suggest this is an impact of the COVID-19 pandemic³⁵.

Special Educational Needs and Disabilities

Special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) can impact a child or young person’s learning due to struggles with concentration (stemming from causes such as Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), reading and writing, as well as difficulties in socialising with their peers³⁶. The severity of a child’s SEND can differ between individuals which is why pupil-centred approaches are necessary to ensure education is a comfortable and constructive experience³⁷.

In Merton 2020/21, 12.6% of school pupils were receiving SEN support. Figure 4 below shows the range of special educational needs support in Merton pupils in 2020/21. The most common needs amongst Merton pupils are those relating to speech, language, and communication (29.8%) followed by pupils dealing with social, emotional, and mental health needs (22.6%)³⁸.

Figure 4: Proportion (%) of pupils in Merton receiving special educational needs support by primary type of need, 2020/21. Source: GOV.UK, Explore Education Statistics³⁹.

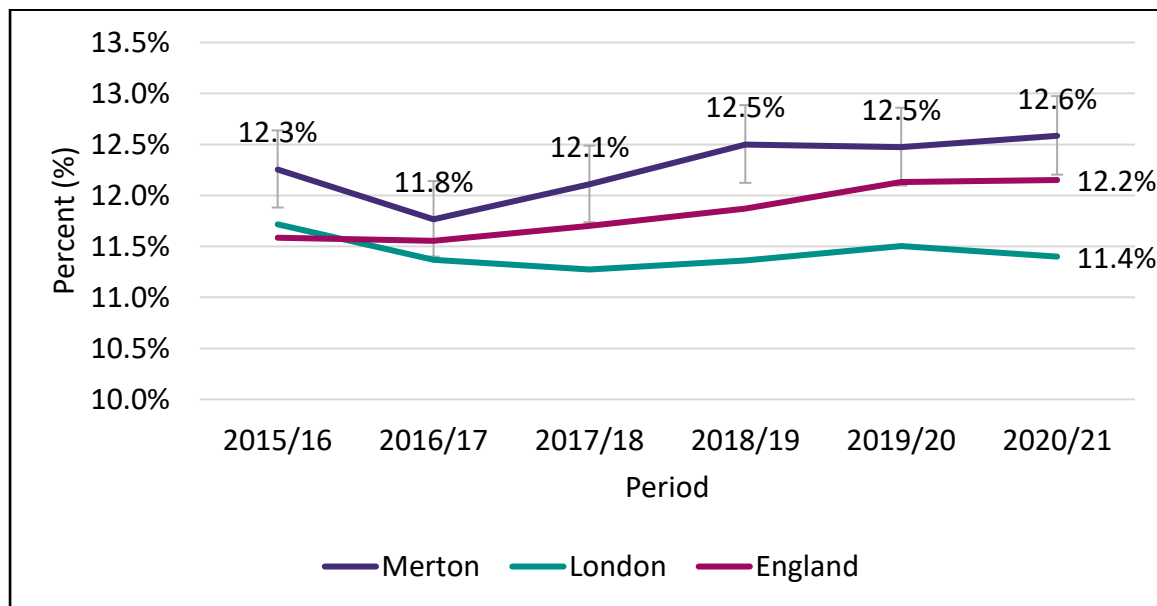


In Merton 2020/21, there were 1,583 pupils with an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP), this accounted for 4.8% of Merton pupils. The primary need amongst those with a EHC plan in Merton was for speech, language, and communication needs at 26.8%, and those receiving assistance for Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASD), at 23.5%⁴⁰.

In Merton 2020/21, the percentage of pupils achieving at least grade 4 or above in both English and mathematics GCSEs was 44.1% for SEN pupils (including SEN support and those with and EHCP), compared to 80.8% for non-SEN pupils⁴¹. The percentage of pupils achieving at least grade 4 and above in both English and mathematics GCSEs for pupils with an EHCP was 21.2%.

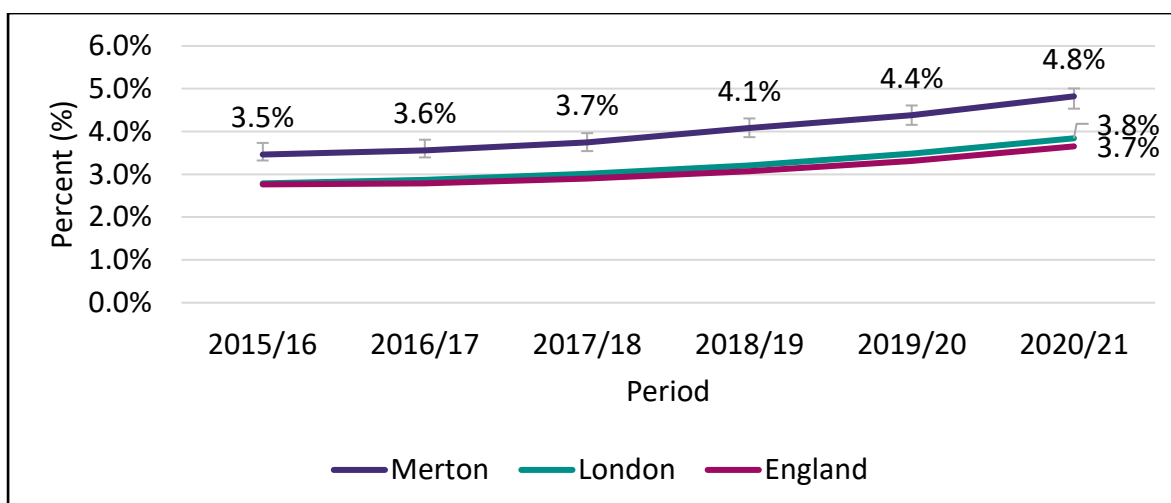
In Merton 2020/21, although the proportion and number of children with SEN support has remained steady at 12.6%, compared to pre-pandemic levels (2019/20), it remains higher than London (11.4%) and similar to England (12.2%)⁴² (Figure 5).

Figure 5: The percentage of students in Merton with Special Educational Needs (SEN) Support between 2015/16 to 2021/22, including London and England comparisons. Source: Explore Education Statistics, GOV.UK⁴³.



The percentage of pupils in Merton with an EHCP has increased from 3.5% in 2015/16 to 4.8% in 2020/21 (Figure 6). The Merton 2020/21 value is significantly higher than both London (3.8%) and England (3.7%)⁴⁴. Recent local activity indicates that the increase in EHCPs in Merton may be levelling off.

Figure 6: The percentage of students in Merton with Education, Health, and Care (EHC) Plans between 2015/16 to 2021/22, including London and England comparisons. Source: Explore Education Statistics, GOV.UK⁴⁵.



Children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) may require considerable SEN support. In Merton 170 children with autism are receiving some SEN support while 328 have a full Education and Health Care Plan (EHCP) (2022) (Table 1)⁴⁵. Some people with both a learning disability and a diagnosis of autism may have high and a complex range of support needs. Increasing complexity of need for this group has been highlighted by colleagues within the learning disability service in Merton.

Table 1: CYP in Merton receiving Special Educational Needs support for Autism Spectrum Disorder, Department of Education, 2021/22.

School Type (Number of pupils)	SEN Support	Statement or EHCP	Total receiving support
State-funded primary	77	173	250
State-funded secondary	93	102	195
State-funded special school	NA	53	53
<i>Total</i>	170	328	498

Service User and Resident Views

In 2021, the Merton Residents survey had shown 56% of participating young people believed the service provision of sixth forms and further education in Merton to be either good or very good. This is a decrease from 2019 (71%). Similarly, 50% of young people in Merton believed the provision of services in Merton supporting or providing young people with guidance for the future to be good or very good. This is also a decrease since 2019 (64%)⁴⁶.

The decreases between 2019 and 2021 may be a result of the pandemic as 71% of participating young people in 2021 were concerned about the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic regarding their education. More specifically, this accounted for 86% of young people aged 15-17 and 61% of those aged 11-14. The Merton Residents survey also found

that when concerns are raised by young people 91% turn to a family member, after which to teachers (49%) further highlighting the importance of the educational setting⁴⁷.

Recommendations for future data collection or analysis:

Analysis within this chapter suggests more detailed data concerning SEND needs and the outcomes of SEND school leavers (such as, work and further education) is needed, as well as close monitoring of Early Years and expected levels of school readiness, including language development following the COVID-19 pandemic to understand its impacts.

Further Information:

1) Start Well Mental Health.

2) Start Well Childhood Adversity and Safeguarding.

3) The *Merton's Youth Residents Survey* highlights the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on young residents living in Merton, including the wider impacts of the pandemic on their education. Found here: <https://www.merton.gov.uk/council-and-local-democracy/get-involved/young-residents-survey-2021>

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⁴⁷ Residents Survey, 2021. London Borough of Merton. [Internet] [cited 7 October 2022]. Available from: <https://www.merton.gov.uk/council-and-local-democracy/performance/annual-residents-survey>