



Reading skills for English pupils among highest in world

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English primary children compare well in reading and science with other countries, but "middling" in maths, today's primary review of international standards shows. But the long tail of underachievement is a concern.

According to the researchers at Cambridge University, "a consistent and disturbing factor" in England's results across all three subjects is a wide spread of scores, signifying a much bigger gap between high and low attaining pupils than in many other countries.

A parallel primary review report on assessment, published today, concluded that levels of literacy in England have remained almost static

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since the 1950s, though maths scores have improved steadily.

But in maths England compares badly internationally. In the 1995 Trends in Mathematical Sciences Study (TIMSS), English children in years 4 and 5 (age eight to 10) compared poorly with other developed countries in the subject. Fourteen countries outperformed England, including most other English-speaking countries.

England's relative performance did improve significantly from 1995 to 2003, however, and more than other countries that took part in both surveys. In 2003 English pupils outperformed Australia, Italy, New Zealand, Norway, Scotland the US and eight other countries.

England compares well internationally in reading. In the 2001 Progress in International Reading Literacy Study, England was in the top group of countries and significantly higher than France, Germany, Italy, Scotland, New Zealand and the US - "evidence of high standards of reading in English primary schools for children at the age of about nine", the report says.

But the report warns that English primary pupils' relatively high attainment in reading skills is at the expense of their enjoyment of reading.

Science at primary level is also "something of a success story", according to the report.

England's performance has also improved in science since 1995.

In the 2003 TIMSS survey, only Singapore and Chinese Taipei did better than England, which scored significantly higher than all other countries, with Japan, Hong Kong and the US performing at a similar level.

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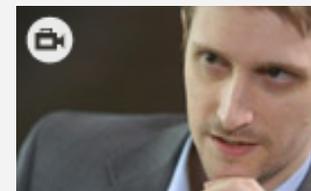
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