

Cambridge AS & A Level · Sociology 9699 · Notes

Ethnicity and educational attainment A2

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Last checked 6 October 2026

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What you need to know

By the end of this topic you should be able to:

1. **Explain racism in schools:** open (overt) racism from pupils or staff, and **institutional racism**, where the ordinary workings of the school (labels, sets, discipline, the curriculum, assessment) leave some ethnic groups worse off even when no one intends it.
2. **Explain cultural explanations** of ethnic patterns in attainment: how family life, values, language and aspirations in different ethnic groups are said to help or hold back pupils, and the criticisms of these explanations.
3. **Explain ethnicity and subcultures:** how pupils from minority groups respond to school, for example by forming pro-school or anti-school groups, and how teachers react to those groups.
4. **Explain how ethnicity, social class and gender combine:** why no ethnic group does uniformly well or badly, and how far ethnicity matters once class and gender are taken into account.

Most questions ask you either to explain how ethnicity affects attainment or to argue against a one-sided view, so you also need to weigh ethnicity against other influences. Class has its own note; here it appears as a rival or overlapping explanation.

Understand it

Ethnicity and the pattern to explain

An **ethnic group** is a group of people who see themselves, and are seen by others, as sharing a culture: often a common origin, language, religion, customs or history. Ethnicity is about culture and identity, while "race" is a label based on supposed physical differences; sociologists treat both as **socially constructed**. An **ethnic minority** is a group that differs from the majority culture of a society, and is often smaller and less powerful.

Three facts about the pattern matter more than any single statistic:

- **Groups differ, in both directions.** In the UK, pupils of Chinese and Indian heritage are among the highest achievers, often above white British pupils. Pupils of Black Caribbean, Pakistani, and Gypsy, Roma and Traveller heritage have tended to do less well on average, and Black Caribbean pupils are excluded from

school far more often than most other groups. So a claim such as "ethnic minorities underachieve" is simply wrong.

- **Patterns change over time.** Some groups, such as Bangladeshi pupils in England, have moved from below the average to around or above it within a generation, which is hard to explain with fixed cultural traits.
- **Ethnicity never works alone.** Within almost every ethnic group, girls do better than boys and middle-class pupils better than working-class pupils. White British boys from low-income homes are among the lowest achievers of all.

Similar patterns appear elsewhere: indigenous peoples (for example in Australia, New Zealand and the Americas), Roma in many European countries and some groups in the USA have lower attainment on average, while some migrant groups do very well. Use examples from your own society where you can.

The explanations fall into **inside-school** factors (racism, labelling, the curriculum, subcultures) and **outside-school** factors (culture, family, language, material deprivation, racism in wider society). Strong answers show how the two interact.

Racism in schools

Overt racism is open hostility: name-calling, bullying, exclusion from friendship groups, or a teacher's openly prejudiced remarks. It can make school feel unsafe, lower self-esteem and lead to absence or to angry reactions that are then punished. **Connolly's** study of a multi-ethnic primary school found that racist name-calling was already common among five- and six-year-olds, and that it shaped how children saw themselves and each other.

Institutional racism is racism built into the rules, routines and assumptions of an organisation. The term became widely used in the UK after the **Macpherson Report** (1999) into the police handling of the murder of Stephen Lawrence; it defined institutional racism as an organisation's collective failure to serve people properly because of their ethnicity, seen in processes and attitudes that disadvantage minorities through unwitting prejudice and stereotyping. **Critical race theory**, used by **Gillborn**, goes further: racism is a normal, deep-rooted feature of society, "locked in" to education, so policies that look neutral can still widen ethnic gaps.

Ways racism in schools can lower attainment:

1. **Teacher expectations and labelling.** Teachers may expect less of some ethnic groups and more of others.
 - **Wright** observed multi-ethnic primary classrooms. Teachers expected Black Caribbean boys to misbehave and disciplined them more, while they talked down to Asian children, assuming their English was poor, and left them out of class discussions.
 - **Gillborn**, in a comprehensive school, found that teachers read the behaviour of Black Caribbean pupils as a challenge to their authority even when it was no different from that of white pupils, so these pupils were criticised and punished more.

- **Archer** argued that the image of the **ideal pupil** held by teachers is white, middle-class and male. Black pupils were often seen as **demonised** (unintelligent, troublesome), while Asian and Chinese pupils were **pathologised**: seen as hard-working but passive conformists rather than naturally able.
 - Through the **self-fulfilling prophecy**, pupils labelled as trouble or as less able may come to see themselves that way and lose interest, so the low expectation comes true.
2. **Setting, streaming and exam entry.** **Gillborn and Youdell** studied two London secondary schools under pressure to raise the share of pupils with five good grades. Teachers' ideas of "ability" followed racial stereotypes, so Black pupils were more often placed in low sets and entered for lower-tier exams with a capped top grade, and were more often treated as not worth the extra effort (**educational triage**). Black pupils have also been under-represented on **gifted and talented** schemes.
 3. **Discipline and exclusion.** If teachers see some pupils' dress, speech or body language as threatening, minor incidents are punished more harshly. Higher exclusion rates for Black Caribbean pupils in the UK mean lost teaching time, and excluded pupils rarely do well.
 4. **The ethnocentric curriculum.** A curriculum is **ethnocentric** when it treats one culture (usually the majority one) as the norm and gives others little place or a negative one. **Coard** argued in the 1970s that schools in Britain taught West Indian children that their own history and culture were inferior, which damaged their self-esteem; he also showed that many were wrongly placed in schools for the "educationally subnormal". **Ball** criticised the English National Curriculum for celebrating a narrow, nostalgic view of British history and culture. Minority pupils may find lessons less relevant, see few people like themselves in books and history, and feel that school is not for them.
 5. **Few role models.** Where teachers and head teachers come mostly from the majority group, minority pupils see fewer adults like themselves in positions of success, and there may be fewer staff who understand their culture.
 6. **Biased assessment and selection.** Tests and entrance exams written within one culture can disadvantage pupils who do not share it (see the intelligence note), and admissions rules, catchment areas and school choice can concentrate some groups in the least popular schools.

Teachers who mean well. **Mirza** studied young Black women and found that open racism was rare. More common were teachers who claimed to treat everyone the same while ignoring racism (**colour-blind**), or who held low expectations while trying to "protect" girls, for example advising them against ambitious careers (**liberal chauvinists**). The girls coped by avoiding some teachers and subjects and by choosing carefully whose help to accept, which protected their self-esteem but narrowed their options.

Pupils can resist labels. Racist labels do not always come true (see subcultures below), and critics such as **Foster** found little evidence of teacher racism in some schools, arguing that differences in behaviour, not stereotypes, explain different treatment. So racism is one explanation, and its effect varies between schools and groups.

Cultural explanations

Cultural explanations look at what pupils bring from home: values, family structure, language and aspirations. Like class, there are **deficit** versions (some cultures lack what success needs) and **difference** versions (schools reward one culture).

Explanations of lower attainment.

- **Language.** Pupils whose home language is not the language of the school may struggle at first, and teachers may confuse limited English with limited ability. **Bereiter and Engelmann** claimed that the speech of poor Black American children was too limited for abstract thinking; **Labov** showed that their dialect could express complex reasoning, so the problem was the school's view of it. Many pupils who speak another language at home catch up and do well by the end of school, so language alone cannot explain lasting gaps.
- **Family structure.** New Right writers such as **Murray** linked the higher rate of lone-mother households among Black Caribbean families to a lack of male role models and discipline for boys. Critics reply that this blames families, ignores how many lone mothers support education strongly, and cannot explain why Black Caribbean girls do better than the boys of the same families.
- **Peer and street culture.** **Sewell** argued that the biggest obstacles for some Black boys lay outside school rather than in teacher racism: a lack of fathers' guidance at home, and a peer and media culture that valued an aggressive "street" masculinity and expensive brands above schoolwork.
- **Oppositional culture.** **Ogbu** compared minorities who chose to migrate (who tend to see education as a ladder) with minorities whose position came from conquest or slavery. Members of the second group may distrust schools run by the majority, and with **Fordham** he found that some African American pupils accused high achievers of "**acting white**", so working hard could cost them friendships.
- **Low self-esteem.** Some writers claimed that minority children had low self-esteem because of their culture's history; critics such as **Stone** found that Black children's self-esteem was not especially low, and argued that racism, not culture, was the problem.

Explanations of higher attainment.

- **Family aspirations and support.** In many migrant families, especially of Chinese and Indian heritage, education is seen as the main route to security and respect. **Basit** interviewed three generations of British Asian families; even grandparents and parents who had little schooling themselves had passed on clear expectations of university and professional work, which the young people took on as their own goals.
- **Parental authority.** **Lupton** found that in some Asian families children were expected to respect adults, and that this habit of deference carried into the classroom, where teachers saw it as good behaviour.
- **Hard work and pressure.** **Archer and Francis** found that British Chinese parents, whatever their class, invested time and money in their children's education and treated success as a family project. The "**tiger mother**" image (strict, high-pressure parenting in some East Asian families) is often used in the same way, though it is a stereotype that fits some families and not others.
- **Cultural capital that survives migration.** **Modood** noted that many migrants had been well educated in their country of origin but took lower-status jobs on arrival. Their children counted as working class by occupation, yet inherited middle-class aspirations and knowledge, which helps explain why class predicts attainment less well for some minorities.

Criticisms of cultural explanations.

- They **blame the victim** and treat minority cultures as deficient, ignoring racism in school and wider society (Gillborn, Keddie).

- They **stereotype**: no ethnic group shares one culture, and groups change quickly over time.
- **Driver** argued that cultural deprivation theory ignores strengths, such as Black Caribbean mothers who act as strong role models for their daughters.
- They overlook **material** differences: groups with lower attainment are often also poorer.
- Positive stereotypes have costs too: high-achieving Chinese pupils still faced racism, and their success was often explained away as passive diligence (Archer and Francis).

Material factors and racism outside school

Several minority groups are more likely than white British families to be poor. In the UK, Pakistani, Bangladeshi, Black African and Black Caribbean households have higher rates of low income, overcrowded housing and unemployment. The reasons include **racism in the labour market** (applicants with "ethnic" names receive fewer job offers), qualifications from abroad not being recognised, and lower pay in the jobs open to new migrants. The effects on attainment are the same as for class: less space and equipment, poorer health, pressure to earn, and schools in deprived areas. Some argue that much of the "ethnic" gap is really a **class** gap; the counter-argument is that gaps remain between groups of similar class.

Ethnicity and subcultures

A **subculture** is a group within a school with its own values and norms. Pupils from minority groups respond to labels and racism in different ways, and their response can raise or lower attainment.

- **Fuller** studied a group of Black Caribbean girls in a London comprehensive, mostly in lower streams. They did not seek teachers' approval and kept a cool, unenthusiastic manner in class, yet they worked hard and aimed for good qualifications to prove the low expectations wrong. Labels, she showed, need not produce failure.
- **Mac an Ghail** studied Black and Asian sixth-form students who resisted their teachers' stereotypes in different ways; how they responded depended on their ethnicity, gender and the school they had come from, and many succeeded.
- **Sewell** identified four responses of Black boys in one school: **conformists** (the largest group, keen to succeed and to fit in); **innovators** (valued qualifications but rejected the school's rules and teachers' approval); **retreatists** (a small group who kept their heads down and withdrew); and **rebels** (who rejected both the school's goals and its rules, and adopted a tough, macho image). Teachers tended to treat all Black boys as if they were rebels, so even conformists could be labelled and punished.
- **Shain** studied Asian girls and found four groups: the **gang girls** stressed a shared Asian or Muslim identity in opposition to racism and the school, and were seen by teachers as a problem; the **survivors** conformed outwardly and worked hard; the **rebels** played down their Asian identity and mixed mainly with white peers; the **faith girls** put their religious identity first, worked hard and avoided conflict. The gang girls tended to do least well, as teachers' negative views of them pushed them further from school.
- **Mirza's** young Black women formed a strategy rather than a gang: they valued education highly but avoided teachers they saw as racist.

How subcultures affect attainment:

1. **Anti-school groups** lower effort and lead to conflict, punishment and exclusion.
2. **Pro-school or quietly determined groups** raise attainment, even against low expectations (Fuller, Sewell's conformists, Shain's survivors).
3. **Teachers react to the group, not the individual:** a pupil seen with a group labelled as troublesome may be placed in a lower set or punished more, starting a self-fulfilling prophecy.
4. **Identity and peer pressure:** a group may see hard work as betraying its identity ("acting white"), or as the way to honour family sacrifices.
5. **Effects on others:** conflict between ethnic subcultures, or a group that dominates a classroom, can disrupt learning for everyone.

Ethnicity, social class and gender together

Intersectionality (a term from **Crenshaw**) means that class, gender and ethnicity combine, so each person's experience depends on all three at once. The question is not "which one matters" but how they interact.

- **Class within ethnicity.** In most ethnic groups, pupils from middle-class homes do better than those from working-class homes, but the size of the class gap varies. It is small for Chinese and Indian pupils (low-income pupils still do well) and large for white British pupils.
- **Ethnicity within class.** **Gillborn and Mirza** analysed national and local data and found that class, gender and ethnicity all affected results, and that Black pupils tended to do worse than white pupils from the same class. In one local authority, Black children were the highest-achieving group when they started school but among the lowest by 16, which suggests that something happened during schooling.
- **Gender within ethnicity.** Girls outperform boys in nearly every ethnic group. Black Caribbean girls do much better than Black Caribbean boys, and Chinese girls are among the highest achievers of all, so gender changes how ethnicity works. Teachers' stereotypes are often gendered as well: Black boys as threatening, Asian girls as quiet and passive, Muslim girls as destined for early marriage.
- **Class as the bigger factor.** Some argue that once class is accounted for, most ethnic gaps shrink; the low results of white working-class boys show that being in the majority does not protect against class disadvantage.
- **Ethnicity as the bigger factor.** Others argue that racism affects minorities of every class, and that middle-class Black pupils still face lower expectations (Gillborn).

Policies

Governments have tried to close ethnic gaps through **multicultural education** (teaching about different cultures and faiths), **anti-racist education** (challenging racism in the curriculum and school rules directly), support for pupils learning the school's language, monitoring exclusions and set placement by ethnicity, and programmes for specific groups. Critics of multicultural education, such as **Troyna**, argue that adding "saris, samosas and steel bands" leaves the power of the majority culture untouched; critics of anti-racist policies (New Right) argue they divide pupils and distract from standards.

Key facts and formulas

There is no formula list in Sociology. "Learn it" means you must remember it.

Key term	Status
Ethnic group, ethnic minority, ethnocentrism; the UK pattern: Chinese and Indian pupils high, Black Caribbean, Pakistani and Gypsy, Roma and Traveller pupils lower on average, girls ahead of boys in nearly every group	Learn it
Overt racism (Connolly) and institutional racism (Macpherson Report); critical race theory, racism "locked in" (Gillborn)	Learn it
Racist labelling: Wright (primary classrooms), Gillborn (behaviour read as a challenge), Archer (ideal, pathologised and demonised pupils), Mirza (colour-blind and liberal chauvinist teachers), self-fulfilling prophecy	Learn it
Setting, exam tiers and educational triage by ethnicity (Gillborn and Youdell); exclusions; gifted and talented schemes	Learn it
Ethnocentric curriculum (Coard, Ball); lack of role models; biased assessment	Learn it
Cultural explanations of low attainment: language (Bereiter and Engelmann, criticised by Labov), family structure (Murray), peer and street culture (Sewell), oppositional culture and "acting white" (Ogbu, Fordham), self-esteem (criticised by Stone)	Learn it
Cultural explanations of high attainment: family aspirations (Basil), parental authority (Lupton), family investment (Archer and Francis), "tiger mothers", migrant cultural capital (Modood); criticisms (Driver, Keddie, Gillborn)	Learn it
Subcultures: Fuller (Black girls), Mac an Ghaill, Sewell (conformists, innovators, retreatists, rebels), Shain (gang girls, survivors, rebels, faith girls), Mirza	Learn it
Intersectionality (Crenshaw); Gillborn and Mirza (class, gender and ethnicity); material deprivation and labour-market racism	Learn it
Paper 3: Question 1 $2 \times 2 = 4$; Question 2 $2 \times 4 = 8$; Question 3 $2 \times 6 = 12$; Question 4 essay 26	Learn it

How to do it

We have tagged 18 questions for this topic (2021–2025, all from Paper 3), 16 different (two Paper 31s repeated a Paper 33 question). None mix two types.

Question type	Questions
Explain two ways or reasons ethnicity affects attainment or school experience (8 marks)	8
Give two arguments against a view on ethnicity and education (12 marks)	5

Question type	Questions
Describe two ways ethnicity shapes school experience (4 marks)	3
Evaluate or assess a view on ethnicity and attainment (essay)	2

1. Explain two ways or reasons ethnicity affects attainment or school experience (8 marks) (8 questions)

Always Question 2. Asked (counting tagged questions): why ethnic background may affect attainment (2, one a repeat); how racism can affect attainment (1); why ethnic subcultures affect attainment (1); why cultural differences between ethnic groups affect attainment (1); how in-school factors affect some ethnic groups (1); how ethnicity influences a pupil's experience of school (1); why attainment is particularly high in some ethnic groups (1).

Each way is marked out of 4 (points-based, not levels):

1. **Point** (1): name the way in one sentence, for example "Teachers may expect less of pupils from some ethnic groups".
2. **Explain** (1): say how it changes results, for example "pupils who are expected to misbehave are watched more closely, punished more and given less encouragement, so they lose interest".
3. **Material** (1): name a study, sociologist, concept or theory, for example Wright.
4. **Link** (1): show **how** that material supports the point, for example "Wright watched primary classrooms where teachers disciplined Black Caribbean boys more often and expected trouble from them, which supports the idea that expectations, not ability, shaped their treatment".

Write two separate paragraphs ("The first reason...", "The second reason..."), and keep **ethnicity** in every sentence: examiners do not credit cultural capital, speech codes or labelling unless you link them to an ethnic group.

Ready-made ways, each with material:

- **Racism in schools:** teacher expectations and labelling (Wright, Gillborn, Archer); placement in low sets and lower-tier exams, triage (Gillborn and Youdell); harsher discipline and exclusion (Gillborn, Sewell); ethnocentric curriculum lowering self-esteem and interest (Coard, Ball); abuse from peers (Connolly); few role models; well-meaning but limiting teachers (Mirza); racism in wider society making pupils feel education is not for them (critical race theory).
- **Culture and home background:** family aspirations and support (Basil, Archer and Francis); parental authority matching school norms (Lupton); language spoken at home (Bereiter and Engelmann, Labov); family structure and role models (Murray, Driver); peer and street culture (Sewell); oppositional culture (Ogbu, Fordham); migrant cultural capital (Modood); material deprivation linked to ethnicity.
- **Subcultures:** anti-school groups and conflict with teachers (Sewell's rebels, Shain's gang girls); pro-school or determined groups (Fuller, Sewell's conformists, Shain's survivors and faith girls); teachers labelling the whole group (Sewell, Shain); peer pressure and identity ("acting white", Fordham and Ogbu);

different forms of language in the group being judged by teachers; marginalisation caused by racism (Shain, Mac an Ghaill); effects on other pupils' learning.

- **Why some groups do particularly well:** high family aspirations and pressure (Basit, Archer and Francis, "tiger mothers"); cultural capital from parents' education before migration (Modood); positive teacher expectations of some groups (Archer, Lupton); pro-school peer groups; middle-class position of some migrant groups.

2. Give two arguments against a view on ethnicity and education (12 marks) (5 questions)

Always Question 3. Views quoted: all ethnic groups have the same experience of education (1); ethnicity has limited impact on attainment (1); lower attainment of some groups is due to their culture (1); all ethnic groups are treated equally in schools (1); ethnic inequality is entirely the result of racism in schools (1).

Each argument is marked separately out of 6 by levels: 1–2 for a bare point, 3–4 for a clear point whose material is not fully linked, **5–6** for a clear, developed argument supported by concepts, theory or evidence, with its relevance stated.

1. Write **two** separate paragraphs ("The first argument against this view...", "A second argument...").
2. Make each a different, broad argument.
3. Back each with named material about **ethnicity** and explain how it works.
4. End each with a sentence that turns it back on the view, using its words ("so ethnic groups are **not treated equally**").
5. Write nothing in support of the view: only arguments against are credited.

Which counter-arguments fit which view:

- **Against "ethnicity has little effect" or "all groups have the same experience":** differences in results between groups; teacher labelling and stereotypes (Wright, Archer, Gillborn); setting, triage and exclusions (Gillborn and Youdell); the ethnocentric curriculum and few role models (Coard, Ball); overt racism from peers (Connolly); family aspirations giving some groups an advantage (Basit, Archer and Francis); language at home; ethnic subcultures (Sewell, Shain, Fuller); poverty linked to ethnicity.
- **Against "all groups are treated equally in schools":** only **in-school** treatment counts, so use labelling, discipline and exclusion, sets and exam tiers, the curriculum and peer racism. Income and home culture are outside the question here.
- **Against "lower attainment is due to culture":** material deprivation and class position (Gillborn and Mirza); racism in school (labelling, triage, curriculum); institutional racism in society, including the labour market; media stereotypes shaping identity and aspirations; criticisms of the cultural view itself (it blames the victim and stereotypes, Driver, Keddie); groups changing quickly over time.
- **Against "entirely the result of racism in schools":** material deprivation; cultural factors such as family aspirations and language; ethnic subcultures and peer pressure (Sewell, Ogbu); racism outside school; school processes with no racist intent behind them; some minority groups doing very well, which racism cannot explain; government policy (marketisation, school funding).

3. Describe two ways ethnicity shapes school experience (4 marks) (3 questions)

Always Question 1. Asked: how a pupil's ethnic culture can affect their experience of education (2, one a repeat); how schools may reinforce ethnic stereotypes (1).

1. Write two bullet points.
2. For each: **identify** the way (1), then one sentence showing **how** it affects the pupil or reinforces the stereotype (1).
3. No introduction and no study needed.

For example: "Ethnic minorities missing from the curriculum (1): if history and literature lessons are almost all about the majority group, pupils learn to see that group as the norm and minorities as unimportant (1)."

Ways to choose from:

- **How schools reinforce ethnic stereotypes:** history lessons that tell the story only from the majority's point of view (for example a colonial empire shown as bringing progress); few minority writers, artists or scientists on the syllabus; stereotyped pictures in textbooks and reading books; teacher labelling; sets, streams and triage that put some groups at the bottom; steering groups towards certain subjects or careers; institutional racism such as rules on dress or holidays; teachers letting racist jokes and name-calling pass without comment, so pupils learn that such views are acceptable; pupils who are pushed into bottom sets or punished more often forming anti-school groups, whose behaviour teachers then take as proof that the stereotype was right.
- **How a pupil's ethnic culture affects their experience:** a different home language or dialect; family expectations and work ethic; family structure and role models; peer group norms about authority, gender or gangs; low self-esteem linked to racism or colonial history; religious practices and dress clashing with school rules.

4. Evaluate or assess a view on ethnicity and attainment (essay) (2 questions)

Question 4 (26 marks) since 2021: ethnicity is the most important influence on attainment (1). The June 2021 Paper 34 asked, in the older format, whether gender is more important than ethnicity (a 16-mark part (b), after a 9-mark part (a) on how teachers influence which pupils succeed, which the class note covers).

The 26-mark essay is marked **AO1** knowledge and understanding 10, **AO2** interpretation and application 6, **AO3** analysis and evaluation 10, so $10 + 6 + 10 = 26$. The 16-mark part used three bands (0–6, 7–11, 12–16), where the top band needs explicit assessment. Both reward the same things.

1. **Introduction** (two or three sentences): define ethnicity and attainment; state the pattern (groups differ in both directions); name the debate.
2. **For the view** (4–5 paragraphs): start with the strongest evidence, that Black pupils fall behind white classmates from similar homes (Gillborn and Mirza), including in an authority where they began school ahead; then classroom treatment (Wright, Archer), sets and exam tiers (Gillborn and Youdell) and the higher exclusion rate of Black Caribbean pupils; the curriculum (Coard, Ball); how pupils respond in groups (Sewell, Shain, Fuller, Mac an Ghail); what families pass on, from Basit's three generations to

home language; the higher poverty rates of Pakistani, Bangladeshi and Black households; and stereotypes that mix ethnicity with gender (Black boys seen as threatening, Asian girls as passive), which show ethnicity shaping the way gender works.

3. **Against the view** (4–5 paragraphs), each written as a criticism: Fuller's girls show that a label can be thrown off; Chinese and Indian pupils outperform the majority, so being a minority is not in itself a handicap; class may matter more, since white British boys on free school meals are among the lowest achievers and part of the gap between groups reflects their different class positions (Modood); in nearly every group girls are ahead of boys, so gender cuts across ethnicity; place matters, because where secondary schools charge fees, as in many low-income countries, a family's money decides who stays on more than its ethnicity does; New Right writers such as Saunders put results down to individual talent and hard work; and Marxists such as Bowles and Gintis argue that capitalism needs a supply of low-paid workers, so schools will fail a share of pupils whatever their background, and ethnicity only affects who makes up that share.
4. **Conclusion:** a reasoned judgement on **how far** the view holds, for which groups and where; the strongest conclusions use intersectionality.

For "gender is more important than ethnicity", put the gender evidence (girls ahead in most groups and countries, the gendered curriculum, teacher interaction) on one side, the ethnic evidence above on the other, and weigh them group by group.

Evaluation moves that lift the mark:

- **Distinguish between groups:** never write "ethnic minorities underachieve" or "all minorities are poor". Name the groups and say which do well and which do not.
- **Link inside and outside school:** language, culture or poverty (outside) often matter because of how teachers and tests respond to them (inside).
- **Criticise the evidence:** small qualitative samples (Fuller, Sewell, Shain), studies that found little teacher racism (Foster), statistics that use broad categories such as "Asian" that hide large differences.
- **Show that labels are not deterministic** (Fuller, Mirza).
- **Use intersectionality** in the conclusion: ethnicity matters most when combined with class and gender.

Worked examples

Example 1

Describe two ways that a pupil's home language may affect their experience of school. [4]

- **Misjudged ability (1):** a pupil still learning the language of the school may give short or hesitant answers, so a teacher may wrongly decide they are less able and place them in a lower set (1).
- **Isolation from peers (1):** a pupil who speaks a different language or dialect may be mocked or left out by classmates, which can make them anxious and less willing to take part in lessons (1).

Two ways, each identified and described: **4 marks**.

Example 2

Explain two ways the curriculum may disadvantage some ethnic minority pupils. [8]

The first way. The curriculum may be ethnocentric, giving little space to the history and culture of minority groups (1). Pupils who rarely see their own background valued in lessons may decide that school is not meant for people like them, and put less effort into it (1). Coard's work on West Indian children in British schools supports this (1): he claimed that what they were taught presented Black people as inferior or left them out, so the children's self-esteem fell and their results suffered with it (1).

The second way. Assessment and selection may be built around the majority culture (1). Tests that assume knowledge of that culture, or of its language, measure familiarity as much as ability, so minority pupils can be underestimated and placed in lower sets or lower-tier exams (1). Gillborn and Youdell's research supports this (1): in their London schools, judgements of "ability" followed racial stereotypes, so Black pupils were more often entered for lower-tier papers whose top grade was capped, limiting what they could achieve (1).

Each way has a point, an explanation, named material and a link: $2 \times 4 = 8$ marks.

Example 3

'Ethnic differences in educational attainment are mainly caused by material deprivation.'

Using sociological material, give two arguments against this view. [12]

Argument 1. The first argument against this view is that racism inside schools affects minority pupils whatever their family income. Gillborn and Mirza found that Black pupils tended to do worse than white pupils from the same social class, so poverty cannot be the full explanation. Studies of classrooms suggest why: Wright saw teachers expect bad behaviour from Black Caribbean boys and discipline them more, and Gillborn and Youdell found Black pupils placed in low sets and lower exam tiers because of stereotypes about their ability. If pupils of similar class background are treated differently because of their ethnicity, then material deprivation is not the main cause of ethnic differences. **Level 3 (5–6 marks).**

Argument 2. A second argument is that some groups with high rates of poverty still achieve very well, which points to cultural factors such as family aspirations. Archer and Francis found that British Chinese parents, including those in low-paid work, invested heavily in their children's schooling and treated success as a shared family goal, and Modood showed that some migrant families kept the aspirations and knowledge of the educated class they had belonged to before migrating. Since low income does not stop these pupils from doing well, differences between ethnic groups must owe a great deal to culture and identity, so material deprivation is not the main cause. **Level 3 (5–6 marks).**

Two clear, developed arguments, each with named material and a closing link to the view: **12 marks.**

Example 4

Evaluate the view that the underachievement of some ethnic groups is mainly the result of in-school factors. [26]

Introduction. Attainment differs between ethnic groups in both directions: some minorities outperform the majority, others fall behind. Interactionists and critical race theorists stress what happens in schools; others point to culture, poverty and class outside school.

For the view (AO1/AO2).

- **Labelling:** teachers' stereotypes lead to more discipline and less encouragement for some groups (Wright, Gillborn), and the ideal pupil is rarely Black (Archer), producing a self-fulfilling prophecy.
- **Setting and triage:** Gillborn and Youdell found Black pupils more often in low sets and lower exam tiers, capping their grades.
- **Exclusions** remove pupils from teaching altogether, and the groups most often excluded have the lowest results.
- **Ethnocentric curriculum:** Coard and Ball show how the curriculum can marginalise minority cultures and lower self-esteem.
- **Change during schooling:** Gillborn and Mirza's evidence of Black children starting school as high achievers and finishing among the lowest suggests that schools themselves widen the gap.

Against the view (AO3).

- **However**, material deprivation is higher in several low-achieving groups, so poverty explains part of the gap before pupils enter school.
- **Cultural factors** work in both directions: family aspirations help explain the success of Chinese and Indian pupils (Basil, Archer and Francis), while Sewell argues that peer culture and absent fathers matter more than teacher racism for some Black boys.
- **Labels can be resisted:** Fuller's Black girls rejected low expectations and succeeded, so in-school factors are not deterministic.
- **The evidence is contested:** Foster found little teacher racism in his research school, and many in-school studies use small samples.
- **Intersectionality:** girls outperform boys in nearly every group, and white working-class boys are among the lowest achievers, so ethnicity and in-school treatment cannot explain the pattern alone.
- **Racism outside school**, in jobs, housing and the media, shapes aspirations and resources before and alongside school.

Conclusion. In-school factors clearly matter, especially for Black Caribbean pupils, whose treatment through labelling, setting and exclusion is well documented. But the success of some minority groups, the effects of poverty, and the way class and gender cut across ethnicity show that in-school factors are one major cause interacting with outside ones, not the main cause on their own.

How it would be marked. A wide range of detailed points with named sociologists (AO1 9–10), applied throughout to "in-school factors" and "some ethnic groups" (AO2 5–6), and each argument weighed to reach a justified conclusion (AO3 9–10). In the exam, make each bullet a full paragraph.

Common mistakes

- **Treating all minorities as one group.** A frequent weakness in essays is writing as if every minority shares one experience, for example that they are all poor or all do badly. Name specific groups and say which do well and which do not.
- **Losing the ethnic link.** Answers that explain speech codes, cultural capital, labelling or anti-school subcultures in general, with no link to an ethnic group, do not score. Every point must say which group and why ethnicity matters.
- **Answering the opposite question.** When a question asks why attainment is **high** among some groups, reasons for low attainment are not credited. Read the wording.
- **Using outside-school points for an in-school question.** For "all ethnic groups are treated equally in schools", the question is about what schools do, so a family's income or culture gains nothing there.
- **Drifting into class or gender.** A paragraph about class or gender earns nothing in an ethnicity question unless it says what that factor means for a particular ethnic group.
- **No material in Question 2.** Many answers explain a good point and stop at 2 of the 4 marks because no study, concept or theory is named and linked. Vague points such as "being treated differently" or "bullying", with no development, score little.
- **Describing studies without applying them.** In essays, summaries of Sewell or Mirza earn little unless you say what they show about attainment.
- **Evaluation by list.** Essays often place class and gender studies next to ethnicity studies without weighing them. Evaluate the evidence itself (samples, dates, broad categories), link internal and external factors, and use intersectionality.

How to get the marks

- **"Describe two..." (4 marks):** two bullet points, each identified and then described in one sentence showing **how** it affects the pupil. No introduction, no study needed.
- **"Explain two..." (8 marks):** for each way, **point, explain, material, link**: four separate marks. Say how the material supports the point ("this supports the idea that...").
- **"Using sociological material, give two arguments against this view" (12 marks):** two separate, developed arguments, each with named material on ethnicity and a closing sentence on why it weakens the quoted view. You can also attack the view's logic, for example by showing that it treats all groups as the same.
- **"Evaluate..." (26 marks):** AO1 10 for a wide range of detailed points with concepts and research; AO2 6 for applying them to the exact wording ("most important", "in-school", "culture"); AO3 10 for explicit, sustained evaluation and a justified conclusion. A good account of the other side with no weighing stops at the 7–8 band for AO3.
- **Sociological material** for this topic: Wright, Gillborn, Gillborn and Youdell, Gillborn and Mirza, Archer, Archer and Francis, Mirza, Coard, Ball, Connolly, Sewell, Shain, Fuller, Mac an Ghaill, Basit, Lupton, Modood, Ogbu, Fordham, Driver, Foster; concepts such as institutional racism, ethnocentric curriculum,

labelling, self-fulfilling prophecy, educational triage, cultural deprivation, cultural capital, subculture and intersectionality.

- **Use examples from your own society:** indigenous, migrant or religious minorities and local policies are credited when relevant.

Quick check

1. What is the difference between overt racism and institutional racism in schools? Give one example of each.
2. Name Sewell's four responses of Black boys to school, and say which one teachers tended to assume all Black boys belonged to.
3. Give two criticisms of cultural explanations of ethnic differences in attainment.
4. What does intersectionality mean, and how does the gap between Black Caribbean girls and boys illustrate it?
5. Which sociologist is linked to each idea? (a) Asian girls grouped as gang girls, survivors, rebels and faith girls. (b) Black girls who rejected low expectations and worked hard. (c) British Asian families' aspirations passed down three generations. (d) Black children high achievers at the start of school but among the lowest by 16.

Answers

1. Overt racism is open hostility, such as racist name-calling by peers (Connolly). Institutional racism is built into the school's normal routines, such as setting decisions based on stereotypes (Gillborn and Youdell) or an ethnocentric curriculum.
2. Conformists, innovators, retreatists and rebels. Teachers tended to see all Black boys as rebels.
3. Any two of: they blame the victim and ignore racism; they stereotype groups as having one culture; they ignore strengths such as strong mothers as role models (Driver); they overlook material deprivation; they cannot explain quick changes in a group's results.
4. Class, gender and ethnicity combine, so a pupil's experience depends on all three at once. Black Caribbean girls do much better than Black Caribbean boys, so ethnicity works differently depending on gender (for example teachers seeing Black boys as threatening).
5. (a) Shain. (b) Fuller. (c) Basit. (d) Gillborn and Mirza.

Past questions to try

- **9699/32/O/N/24 Q2**: explain two reasons why ethnic subcultures can affect attainment.
- **9699/31/M/J/24 Q2**: explain two reasons why cultural differences between ethnic groups may affect attainment.
- **9699/32/O/N/23 Q3**: two arguments against the view that lower attainment is due to the culture of some ethnic groups.
- **9699/32/F/M/22 Q3**: two arguments against the view that ethnic inequality is entirely the result of racism in schools.