

## **ABSTRACT**

**AIM** The aim of this study was to improve the understanding of how visual impairment affects the educational attainments of secondary school students. **FINDINGS** Across the whole of the UK, the statistics showed that visual impairment does affect educational attainment. The effect is compounded if the pupil also has other special educational needs (SEN). For England and Wales, we analysed educational attainment at Key Stage 4 using the National Pupil Databases. The findings suggest that all children with visual impairment entered secondary school with lower attainment than other pupils, but the worst off were those with both a sight impairment and another SEN. Over half of all visually impaired pupils had an additional SEN, typically moderate learning difficulties. Just 15% of these pupils with both visual impairment and an additional SEN achieved 5 or more GCSEs (A\*-C). This compared with 54% of visually impaired pupils without another SEN and 64% of pupils without any SEN. In England, the achievement of pupils with both visual impairment and other SEN remained significantly lower even after statistically accounting for their prior attainment. This indicates that pupils with both visual impairment and additional SEN unrelated to sight continue to fall behind during secondary school. In contrast, when we controlled for the pupils' prior school results the GCSE results of pupils with only visual impairment were no different from the results of pupils without SEN. We concluded that the small attainment gap was probably already present before the pupils began secondary school but did not widen in secondary school. In Northern Ireland and Scotland,

school results are collected for school leavers. The statistics for these countries showed similar patterns of achievement as found for England and Wales. Pupils without SEN had the highest attainment levels, pupils with visual impairment had lower attainment levels but the lowest exam results were recorded for pupils with other SEN. METHODOLOGY This was a quantitative study based on secondary analysis of administrative data collated from the National Pupil Databases for England and Wales, the Northern Ireland School Leavers Survey and the Scottish Annual Pupil Census.