

NOTE D'INFORMATION

n° 21.03 – Janvier 2021

800,000 students evaluated at the beginning of the sixth grade in 2020: performance is on the rise, but still varies according to student characteristics and schools

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Layout: Frédéric Voiret
e-ISSN 2431-7632

► In September 2020, all sixth grade students were assessed in French and mathematics on digital media (800,000 students in nearly 7,000 middle schools) for the fourth consecutive year. The evaluation took place after the lock-in episode of March to April 2020. We note an improvement in results in both French and mathematics compared to 2019. In French, nearly nine out of ten students have a satisfactory or very good command of the knowledge and skills assessed at the beginning of the sixth grade. In mathematics, more than seven out of ten do so. Girls perform better than boys in French, while in mathematics the results are comparable. Performance continues to vary widely according to the social profile of the schools. In 2020, the analysis of additional data from specific tests confirms these findings in each discipline. Finally, the results of a fluency test, calculated on a sample of students, indicate that only slightly more than half of sixth graders have a satisfactory level of fluency, with clear differences depending on the schooling sector.

► In September 2020, for the fourth consecutive year, more than 800,000 sixth-grade students in nearly 7,000 public and private middle schools under contract took a standardized digital assessment. The results of this assessment provide a snapshot of students' knowledge and skills in French and mathematics at the beginning of middle school, both nationally and in each "académie".

The system was enriched in 2020 by the addition of two specific tests, in mathematics and in French, giving rise to individual feedback for each item. An individual (non-numerical) reading fluency test was also offered to students to assess their ability to correctly read a text aloud. The assessment was not an exhaustive scan of the curriculum. As in 2019, for French, the exercises tested the knowledge and skills associated with "Reading Comprehension", "Study of Language" and "Oral Comprehension". For mathematics, the knowledge and skills associated with "Numbers and Calculations", "Magnitude and Measurement" and "Space and Geometry" are concerned (see methodology "Evaluations"). It is essential to keep in mind that this assessment provides information of students' command when they enter middle school. It does not, however, say anything about what the middle school itself is doing. At the beginning of the sixth grade, 88% of students have acquired the knowledge and

skills expected in the French curriculum and 72% in mathematics.

Nationally, at the beginning of the 2020-2021 school year, 88.3% of students have a satisfactory or very good command of knowledge and skills in French ↘ [figure 1](#). Results are lower in mathematics, where the elements necessary for the acquisition of knowledge and skills are correctly assimilated by 71.9% of students ↘ [figure 2](#).

Girls perform better than boys in French

In French, 91.1% of girls have a satisfactory or very good command of the knowledge and skills assessed. They were more than 5 points ahead of the boys (85.7%). In mathematics, performance was comparable by gender: 71.6% of girls showed satisfactory or very good command, compared with 72.1% of boys.

Significantly lower results for students older than the modal age

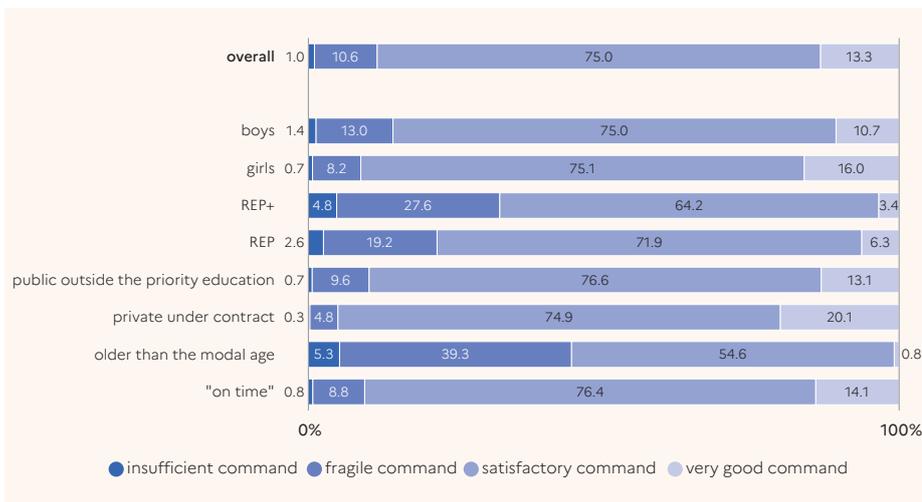
The command rate, as measured by the combination of "satisfactory command" and "very good command", varies considerably between students older than the modal age and those who are "on time" (a difference of 35 points in French and 47.8 points in

math). Thus, nine out of ten (90.5%) of the "on time" students have a satisfactory or very good command in French, whereas slightly more than half of the students older than the modal age (55.4%) manage to master the expectations. In the case of mathematics, three quarters of "on time" students (74.7%) have a satisfactory or very good command of the subject. This situation concerns only 26.9% of students older than the modal age.

Academic difficulties for students entering priority education

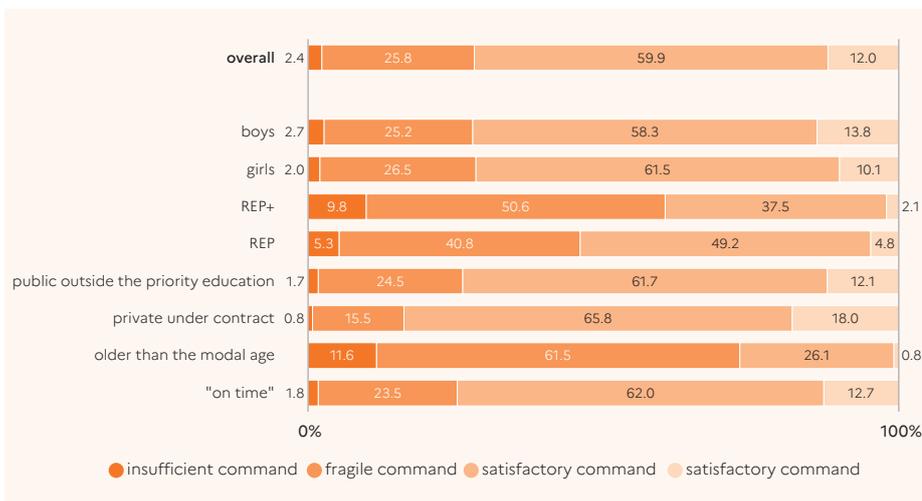
There are significant differences between students entering the sixth grade in the priority education sector and those who do not. Students in public schools belonging to a REP+ (Réseau d'éducation prioritaire renforcée) have particularly marked difficulties. In fact, the command rate difference with students in public schools outside the priority education sector is 22.1 points in French (67.6% versus 89.7% with satisfactory or very good command). In mathematics, the command rate difference between REP+ students and those in the public sector outside priority education is 34.2 points (39.6% vs. 73.8%). Students entering the sixth grade in the private sector have a better command of the knowledge and skills assessed than students entering the public sector outside priority

1 Mastery of knowledge and skills in French



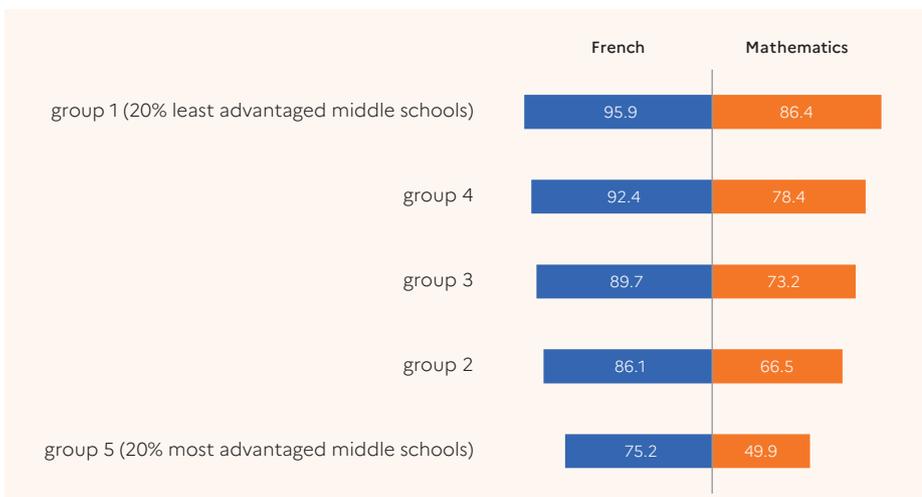
Reading: 75.0% of sixth graders have a satisfactory command of French knowledge and skills.
Field: Metropolitan France + DROM + French Polynesia and Saint-Pierre-et-Miquelon, Public + Private under contract.
Source: évaluation exhaustive de début de sixième, Septembre 2020, MENJS-DEPP.
 Réf. : Note d'Information, n° 21.03. © DEPP

2 Command of knowledge and skills in mathematics



Reading: 59.9% of sixth graders have a satisfactory command of knowledge and skills in mathematics.
Field: Metropolitan France + DROM + French Polynesia and Saint-Pierre-et-Miquelon, Public + Private under contract.
Source: évaluation exhaustive de début de sixième, Septembre 2020, MENJS-DEPP.
 Réf. : Note d'Information, n° 21.03. © DEPP

3 Proportion of students with a satisfactory or very good command of French and mathematics according to the middle school's average social profile



Reading: 95.9% of students in the most socially advantaged middle schools (Group 5) have mastered knowledge and skills in French.
Field: Metropolitan France + DROM + French Polynesia and Saint-Pierre-et-Miquelon, Public + Private under contract.
Source: évaluation exhaustive de début de sixième, Septembre 2020, MENJS-DEPP.
 Réf. : Note d'Information, n° 21.03. © DEPP

education (+5.3 points for french, +10 points for mathematics). These results must, of course, be set against the social structure of the students enrolled.

Significant differences according to the middle school's social profile

The DEPP has drawn up a social position index that makes it possible to report on the social level of the middle school. The average of this index was calculated for each middle school. At the national level, this has made it possible to divide the students into five groups, from those belonging to the 20% least advantaged middle schools to those belonging to the 20% most advantaged middle schools. The disparities in command rate are very marked according to the social profile of the school. In the most socially advantaged middle schools (group 5), the command rates, measured by the combination of the modalities "satisfactory command" and "very good command", were 95.9% in French and 86.4% in mathematics (see figure 3). The range of command rates among the five groups confirms the generally observed correlation between social origin and the level of student achievement. In the least advantaged schools, the command rates were 75.2% and 49.9% for French and mathematics respectively.

Improved performance in 2020

In 2020, there was an improvement in results in both French and mathematics compared to 2019 (see To learn more figure 4.1). In French, the command rate, measured by the combination of "satisfactory command" and "very good command", rose from 83.5% in 2019 to 88.3% in 2020 (+4.8 points). In mathematics, the increase is less pronounced: from 69.0% to 71.9% (+2.9 points). In French, the increase in performance between 2019 and 2020 concerns all teaching sectors. Thus, the proportion of students with a "satisfactory command" or "very good command" rose by 3.9 points in the private sector, by 5.1 points in the public sector outside priority education, by 5.3 points in REP and by 4.6 points in REP+ (see To learn more figure 4.2). In mathematics, the increase was more pronounced in the private sector (+4.4 points) and in the public sector outside priority education, but to a lesser degree (+3.0 points). On the other hand, it is weak in REP (+1.3 points) and results are stable in REP+ (-0.2 points). Between 2019 and 2020, the performance gaps between students in the

public sector outside of priority education and those in REP/REP+ therefore increase in mathematics, which is not the case in French.

When we look at the evolution of performance according to the social profile of the middle school, we find similar trends to those observed concerning the educational sector. In French, the increase in performance concerns all students, regardless of the social profile of their middle school. It is even slightly more pronounced in the schools that enroll the least socially advantaged students (groups 1 to 3), where the increase exceeds 5 points between 2019 and 2020, compared to the middle schools that enroll the most advantaged students (+4.7 points in middle schools in group 4 and +3.5 points in middle schools in group 5) (see **To learn more figure 4.3**).

On the other hand, in mathematics, the increase in performance between 2019 and 2020 is greater in the most advantaged middle schools (+3.7 points in Group 5 middle schools) than in those that are less advantaged (+0.7 points in Group 1 middle schools).

In both French and mathematics, the progress observed between 2019 and 2020 is more pronounced among boys. Thus, the proportion of students with "satisfactory command" or "very good command" increased by 6.2 points among boys in French, compared to 3.3 points among girls (see **To learn more figure 4.4**). In mathematics, the increase was 3.8 points for boys and 1.9 points for girls.

The gender gaps in French narrowed in 2020 (+5.5 points in favor of girls). In mathematics, performance by gender is much more comparable regardless of the year of assessment.

In 2020, for French, nine out of ten students (90.4%) who are "on time" have a satisfactory or very good command of this subject, whereas slightly more than half of the students older than the modal age (55.4%) manage to master the expectations: increases of 4.2 points and 6.4 points respectively compared with 2019 (see **To learn more figure 4.5**). In mathematics, "on-time" students show an increase in their performance in 2020 (+2.6 points). Conversely, among students older than the modal age, the share of those with satisfactory or very good command is lower in 2020 than in 2019 (-1.9 points). The difference between the command levels of these two categories of students reaches 478 points in 2020, a level higher than those observed in previous assessments (around 44 points).

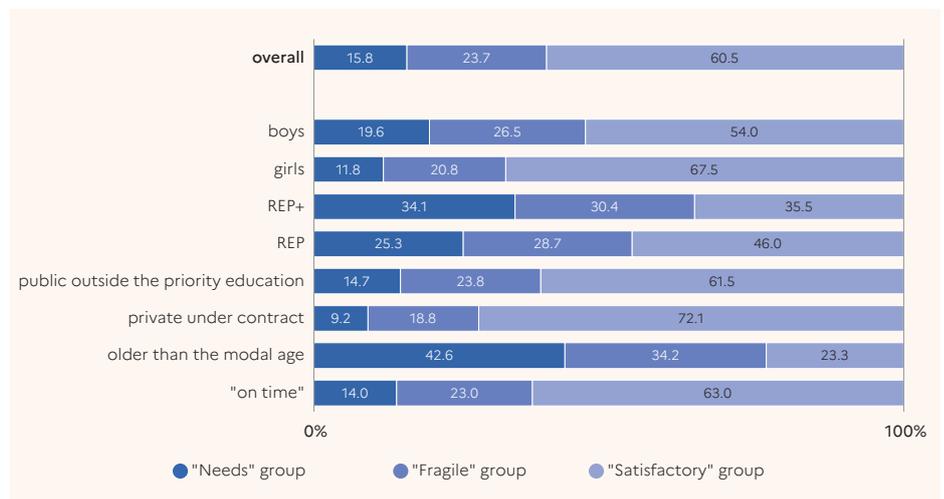
Performance on specific tests strongly influenced by the social profile of the school

In 2020, two specific tests were offered to students, one on "reading comprehension" in French and the other on "problem solving" in mathematics. For each of these tests, two thresholds of success were determined, in order to identify three groups of students: a threshold below which it can be considered that the students encounter difficulties from the beginning of the year, and therefore that a need for support is identified ("needs" group, threshold 1); a second threshold below which the students' achievements seem fragile ("fragile" group, threshold 2); students obtaining results above this threshold are considered to have a satisfactory command of these domains ("satisfying" group).

The proportion of students in the "satisfactory" group is 60.5 percent **↘ figure 5**. In the public sector, it varies from 35.5% in REP+ to 61.5% in public middle schools outside REP. As before, the differences in distribution are very marked according to the social profile of the institution (see **Further Reading, Figure 5.1**). In the most socially advantaged middle schools (group 5), the proportion of students in the 'satisfactory' group was 75.8 %, whereas it was 42.6 % in middle schools with the least socially advantaged students (group 1). Finally, the difference between girls and boys is more than 13 points in favor of girls (67.5% versus 54%).

The proportion of students in the "satisfactory" group in mathematics is 61.5% **↘ figure 6**. Here again, in the public sector, it

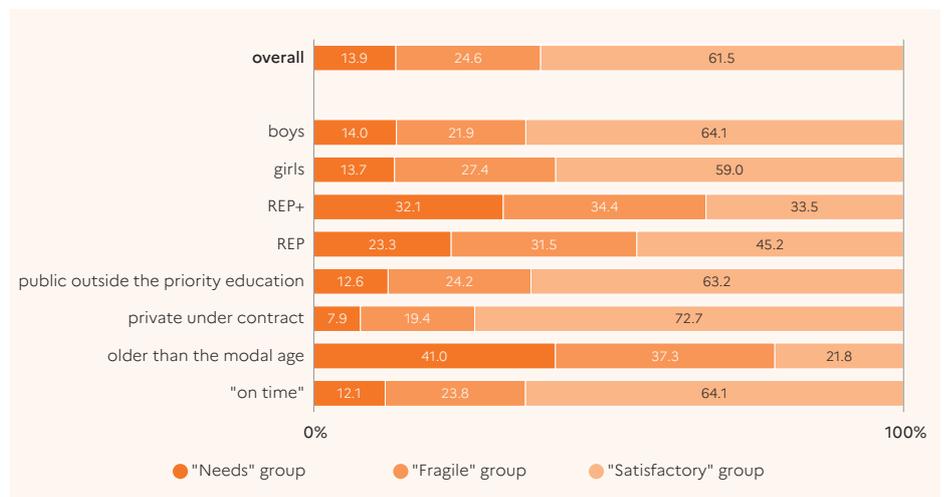
↘ 5 Distribution of students in groups for the French specific test



Reading: The proportion of students achieving a satisfactory score in French is 60.5%.
Field: Metropolitan France + DROM + French Polynesia and Saint-Pierre-et-Miquelon, Public + Private under contract.
Source: évaluation exhaustive de début de sixième, Septembre 2020, MENJS-DEPP.

Réf. : Note d'Information, n° 21.03. © DEPP

↘ 6 Distribution of students in groups for the specific mathematics test



Reading: The proportion of students achieving a satisfactory score in mathematics is 61.5%.
Field: Metropolitan France + DROM + French Polynesia and Saint-Pierre-et-Miquelon, Public + Private under contract.
Source: évaluation exhaustive de début de sixième, Septembre 2020, MENJS-DEPP.

Réf. : Note d'Information, n° 21.03. © DEPP

varies from 33.5% in REP+ to 63.2% in public middle schools outside REP. The disparities in proportions are very marked according to the social profile of the institution. In the most socially advantaged middle schools (group 5), the proportion of students in the "satisfactory" group was 76.6%, whereas it was 41.7% in middle schools with the least socially advantaged students (group 1), in proportions very similar to those observed for the specific French test (see To learn more figure 6.1).

Finally, the gender gap here is to the advantage of the boys, for whom the proportion of students in the 'satisfactory' group is 64.1% compared with 59.0% for the girls (a gap of 5.1 points).

Only slightly more than half of students entering the sixth grade have a fluency level defined as satisfactory

For the first time in 2020, students were given a reading fluency test at the beginning of the sixth grade. The indicators presented here  figure 7 are calculated on the basis of data collected from a representative sample of approximately 29,000 students.

The fluency score corresponds to the number of words correctly read in one minute on a standardized text. At the national level, the average score is about 124 words, and is therefore within the norms of the expectations for the end of grade 5 as described in the Repères de progressivité (120 words and more).

However, at the beginning of the sixth grade, while more than half of the students (53.4%) reached this objective, 15.4% did not reach 90 words read in one minute (expected at the end of the third grade) and 31.1% showed weaknesses on this exercise (score between 90 and 120 words per minute).

In this domain, as is more generally observed in French results, differences between boys and girls are to be noted in terms of average score, as well as in the distribution in the needs groups. The average score for girls is almost 9 points higher than for boys (127 words for girls versus 118 for boys). Eighteen percent of boys fail to read 90 words (expected at the end of third grade) in one minute compared to 12.7 percent of girls. The results also differ according to schooling sector. In the public sector excluding priority education, 52.1% of students reach the 120-word threshold, compared with 34.8% in REP+, a sector in which one-third of students do not reach 90 words per minute (compared with 9.4% of students entering the private sector and half as many in the public sector excluding priority education).

Here again, the disparities in command are very marked according to the social profile of the school. In the most socially advantaged middle schools (group 5), the proportion of students achieving a score of 120 words was 68.4%, whereas it was 40.2% in middle schools with the least socially advantaged students (group 1). ■

7 Distribution of students in groups for the fluency test

characteristics		less than 90 words	from 90 to 120 words	120 words and more	Average score	Standard deviation
Age	"on time"	13.7	30.8	55.5	125.6	35.4
	older than the modal age	28.7	34.0	37.3	108.7	38.6
Schooling sector	private under contract	9.4	25.9	64.7	133.6	34.9
	public outside the priority education	15.6	32.3	52.1	122.9	35.6
	REP	21.4	33.0	45.6	116.5	36.2
	REP +	30.7	34.5	34.8	105.4	38.3
gender	girls	12.7	29.6	57.7	127.1	35.8
	boys	18.0	32.4	49.6	118.5	36.4
Middle school's social profile	group 1 (20% least advantaged middle schools)	25.3	34.5	40.2	111.1	36.6
	group 2	20.0	35.1	44.9	116.7	35.2
	group 3	16.5	33.5	49.9	121.2	35.0
	group 4	13.8	32.2	54.1	124.3	33.8
	group 5 (20% most advantaged middle schools)	7.5	24.1	68.4	137.3	34.9
overall		15.4	31.1	53.4	123.6	36.3

Reading: 31.1% of sixth graders have a fluency score between 90 and 120 words.

Field: Metropolitan France + DROM + French Polynesia and Saint-Pierre-et-Miquelon, Public + private under contract.

Source: évaluation exhaustive de début de sixième (échantillon représentatif de 29,000 élèves), Septembre 2020, MENJS-DEPP.

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FOR MORE INFORMATION

You can access this Note d'Information 21.03, the figures and additional data on education.gouv.fr/etudes-et-statistiques