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Guidance

School performance tables: how to interpret the data

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Data in the school performance tables can only show part of the picture of a school and its pupils' achievements.

Read the school performance tables supporting documents to see the methodologies in more depth.

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1. Factors that can affect performance results

When measuring a school or college's effectiveness, you should consider the context of the school, as there may be factors that can help explain its performance.

For example, you should consider:

- the school type, eg pupils in a special school (ie one for children with special educational needs or disabilities) may have lower prior attainment than those in a mainstream school
- the pupils' characteristics, eg how many are eligible for free school meals

You should also consider how the school's performance compares to local and national results.

1.1 Comparing schools with small pupil numbers

When comparing schools or colleges, you should consider that differences may not be significant if you're looking at a small year group. For example, if 1 pupil in a group of 10 fails to make expected progress, this will reduce figures by 10%, whereas in a group of 30 pupils, this would only reduce figures by 3%.

Small schools may also see a lot of variation in their results over time. We publish 3-year averages of both attainment and progress to account for the effect that 1 or 2 pupil's results can have on small schools' figures.

Where the numbers of pupils are very small, we show the related performance measures as 'suppressed' (ie not published - labelled 'SUPP'

in the table) to make sure the pupils can't be identified.

1.2 Changes to policy and methodology

When comparing a school's results over time, it's important to consider that it may not be possible to make a like-for-like comparison between years, due to changes in calculation or policy.

For example, we calculated school results in the 2014 and 2015 secondary performance tables on a different basis to those in the 2013 tables due to reforms.

2. Consider progress as well as attainment

While attainment figures tell you about the performance of a school's pupils at the end of a key stage, it's important to consider that pupils have varying levels of ability and many different starting points.

Some pupils may seem to be achieving low results, based on their overall attainment at the end of a key stage. However, if you look at a pupil's 'expected progress' and 'value added' results, which take into account their attainment at the end of the previous key stage, they may actually be achieving higher-than-expected results.

Expected progress measures show the proportion of pupils in a school who make at least the minimum amount of progress we expect all pupils to make.

Value added measures show how much progress pupils in a school make compared to pupils of similar ability nationally.

2.1   Progress at key stage 2 and key stage 4

In the performance data, we group pupils at key stage 2 and key stage 4 as low, middle or high attainers, depending on their attainment at the end of key stage 1 and key stage 2.

You should consider how well a school's low, middle or high attainers are progressing. This is an indication of whether a school is equally effective at helping all of its pupils meet their potential rather than, for example, just high attainers.

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