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Department  
for Education

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

Read the [school and college performance tables supporting documents](#) for information on how we calculate performance measures in more depth.

## 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, for example pupils at a special school (for children with special educational needs or disabilities) may have lower prior attainment than those in a mainstream school
- the pupils' characteristics, for example how many are considered disadvantaged (eligible for free school meals in the last 6 years, or have been looked after by their local authority) or who have English as an

additional language

You should also consider how the school or college'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, in a group of 10 pupils, 1 pupil would represent 10% and in a group of 30 pupils, 1 pupil would represent 3%.

Small schools may see a lot of variation in their results over time due to the effect that 1 or 2 pupils' results can have on the school average.

Where the numbers of pupils or students are very small, we show the related performance measures as 'suppressed' (not published and labelled 'SUPP' in the table) to make sure the pupils or students can't be identified.

## 1.2 Comparing data year-on-year

In 2016, there were policy changes at key stage 2, key stage 4 and 16 to 18 which mean it is not always possible to compare year-on-year results over time.

In 2017, reformed (9 to 1) GCSEs were introduced in English and maths. This has affected the way key stage 4 measures are calculated compared to previous years.

Read more about [changes to qualifications and the way we calculate performance](#).

## 1.3 Unapproved qualifications

We don't include data on all key stage 4 qualifications in secondary performance tables. Since the 2014 [policy reforms](#), we only count [approved qualifications](#).

Schools that offer unapproved qualifications (for example unregulated international GCSEs) may find that their performance is recorded as 0% against the headline measures (for example English Baccalaureate entry and achievement). This has an effect on the national figures.

There are other reasons why a school may have a score of 0% in threshold measures, for example attainment below C grade or equivalent for qualifications that count towards performance at key stage 4.

Since 2016, the 16 to 18 performance tables have only counted [16 to 19 qualifications, discount codes and point scores](#). These include academic, applied general and tech level qualifications at level 2 and level 3 vocational qualifications.

## 2. Consider both attainment and progress

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, a pupil's progress score will take into account their attainment at the end of the previous key stage, and the progress they have made since that point compared to pupils with similar starting points. When this is taken into account schools may in fact be helping pupils achieve better results than similar pupils nationally.

## 2.1 Low, middle or high attainers

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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