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[Department
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Guidance

Similar schools model for attainment: overview

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Applies to England

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The Department for Education (DfE) and Ofsted have been working together to develop a similar schools model for attainment. This provides additional information to help understand how well pupils in one school are achieving compared to schools with a similar context. The model identifies similar schools based on a range of factors that have been shown to be key influences on attainment.

How similar schools data will be used in inspections

Ofsted will include similar schools information in its inspection data summary reports (IDSR) from September 2026. The data will not be used to make grading decisions. Instead, it will add an extra layer of information to support inspectors' understanding of a school's context and will help with discussions around achievement and pupils' progress with school leaders.

Similar schools comparisons will sit alongside the existing data in the IDSR. Inspectors consider the data in the IDSR as part of their preparation for inspection, using it to inform their discussions with school leaders. During the inspection, inspectors look at the evidence they gather about achievement on-site – through lesson visits, discussions with pupils and looking at pupils' work – alongside the information in the IDSR.

Similar schools comparisons will help inspectors to even better understand the school's context and achievement data to form a more rounded view of the school's performance over time.

DfE's digital platform for schools

Similar schools data (including a list of 50 similar schools) will be included in the department's upcoming digital platform. This will support improvement in all schools as part of the department's universal regional improvement for standards and excellence (RISE) programme.

The digital platform is designed specifically as a service for schools, allowing them to benchmark their performance. As a school-facing product, it will not be publicly accessible. The platform will help schools to understand their strengths, identify areas for improvement, and then to connect with other schools, helping enable a self-improving system. It will also signpost schools to resources available to support school improvement.

How the similar school model works

The model is based on the statistical technique of regression analysis. This involves assessing data on a range of factors for their ability to predict a specific outcome. In this case, the outcome is pupil attainment, measured by average score in key stage 2 (KS2) reading and maths and key stage 4 (KS4) attainment 8 scores.

There are many possible factors that can help explain variations in attainment. We are interested in those which are contextual rather than those which schools can directly influence – such as teaching, leadership effectiveness and attendance.

The model reduces a long list of potential variables down to the factors which are most strongly associated with variation in attainment between schools, while avoiding duplication.

Most of the data is already available to schools and inspectors in the IDSR. We use whole-school pupil data, not just 'exam year' pupils, to ensure that the model identifies similar schools, not just similar exam cohorts.

The model comprises the following variables:

Prior attainment – where available for those pupils in the relevant phase

The KS4 model uses a KS2 reading and maths combined measure and the KS2 model use KS1 test scores (some pupils do not have data due to the COVID-19 pandemic).

Disadvantage

As measured by:

- Pupil Premium eligibility
- IDACI – a scaled, neighbourhood-level measure of income deprivation that affects children
- POLAR4 – a measure which captures progression to higher education, reflecting differences in educational opportunity and aspiration

Pupil cohort information

Pupil numbers and stability (the percentage of pupils who were admitted to the school at the standard time of admission).

Inclusion

The proportions of pupils with SEND support, an education, health and care plan (EHCP) and English as an additional language (EAL).

The model aims for a good quality of matching between similar schools and produces a list of 50 similar schools for each mainstream primary and secondary school. Individual school data, such as performance data, can then be compared with averages from a group of schools which are similar. However, these schools will not be identical and will not necessarily be grouped closely together on all metrics.

Additional technical guidance will contain further detail on the effects of the model.

We expect the model to follow an annual update cycle to reflect changes including data availability (such as the move from KS1 assessments to the reception baseline assessment for KS2 progress) potentially changing relationships between attainment and other factors. This will also keep it as relevant as possible.

Further information about the model

Detailed technical guidance about the similar schools attainment model will be published soon. Similar schools data will be available to schools, through their IDSR, from September 2026. Ofsted's inspection materials have also been updated to include references to the use of similar schools data from September.

Further information on how this data will be used as part of schools inspections will be shared over this term, as well as through Ofsted's published training for inspectors.

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