

CSN POLICY BRIEFING

Progress 8 school performance measure: Revised DfE Guidance

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Author Andrew Crompton
LGIU/CSN Associate

Summary

The DfE has published revised guidance for schools and local authorities on the [Progress 8 school performance measure in 2016, 2017 and 2018](#) (September 2016) which explains how the Attainment 8 and Progress 8 measures will be calculated and used in performance tables and 'floor standards' for schools. It includes technical guidance and details of the additional information and support materials which will be published for teachers on 'Raise online'. Data has now been released to schools for checking prior to the publication of 2016 league tables, and preliminary school Progress 8 figures (based on unchecked data) will be published later in October.

This briefing outlines (a) what the new measures are and how they relate to more earlier previous measures, and (b) some of the issues and implications of these changes for schools, including the possible use of Progress 8 and Attainment 8 data to identify 'coasting schools'. This briefing will be of interest to elected members and officers in local authorities and partner organisations with responsibility for schools and school improvement. It will also be of interest to governors and managers in schools.

Background

The Progress 8 (P8) indicator is the new secondary school accountability measure, designed to move away from a measure (% achieving 5+ A*-C grades) that only calculated performance at a particular threshold, to a new measure that focuses on the progress made by all students since Key Stage 2 (KS2) tests at the end of primary school. One of the advantages of this measure is that it encourages schools to focus on the performance of every pupil, whether high or low performing. With the old measure, a low ability or high ability pupil could have made excellent progress from their respective starting points, without that having any impact on the key performance measure for the school.

The introduction of P8 is also about (i) ensuring that the key skills of English and mathematics are important (by double weighting them) and (ii) ensuring that a broad and balanced curriculum is valued through the way different subjects are included in the measure. A selected set of 8 subjects (explained below) is used to calculate an 'Attainment 8' (A8) measure which is then used to calculate the 'Performance 8' measure. Both A8 and P8 scores will be published for the first time in 2016 performance tables for all maintained schools, which will be released later this academic year.

The DfE describe the P8 measure as a 'value added' measure, because pupils' results are compared to the actual achievements of other pupils with the same previous KS2 results.

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However, unlike some previous value added measurements, it does not take into account any contextual information (such as free school meals or special educational needs).

Some schools piloted the new measure last year and will have a P8 figures for 2015. The DfE will not publish or use this information in any review of school performance. This is because some schools may have changed their curriculum to take account of the Progress 8 later than others, and because of this, it may not have been reflected in 2015 outcomes data.

Briefing in full

The DfE technical documents give far greater detail than this briefing paper. however below is a short summary of how the relevant figures are calculated. GCSE grades up to and including 2016 are measured on a 1 to 8-point score scale (G to A*). A pupils' attainment across a particular set of 8 GCSE subjects is known as the 'Attainment 8' score and the 'Progress 8' score is based on the progress made since the end of KS2 to the point that the Attainment 8 score is achieved.

Attainment 8

Attainment 8 (A8) measures a pupil's average grade across a suite of eight subjects. The 8 qualifications that count towards the A8 measure must fall into one of three 'buckets'. If a qualification does not fall into one of these buckets, it is not counted, and therefore will not contribute to a Progress 8 (P8) measure. These buckets are:

- **Bucket 1** English and Maths. Maths is given double weighting and English is double weighted if a pupil has taken both English Language and English Literature. If so, the higher of the two grades is used, and double weighted.
- **Bucket 2** can be filled with a pupils three highest grades from Ebacc subjects (see Related Briefings). These include separate sciences, core and additional sciences, computer science, history, geography and languages. Double science counts as two slots in this bucket. otherwise science GCSEs count singly.
- **Bucket 3** is filled with a pupils' three highest point scores in any three other subjects, including English Literature or Language (if not counted in bucket 1), any further Ebacc qualifications, other GCSEs, or any other approved academic or vocational qualifications. These also are not double weighted.

The 8 grades from the three buckets are added together and divided by 10 to produce a student's A8 score. If a student has fewer than 8 qualifications, or if some of their qualifications do not fit into one of the three buckets then they will score 0 points for the unfilled slots. A student's score is always divided by 10 to produce an average score (10 representing the 8 subject slots, with English and Maths double weighted). It is not mandatory for students to take 8 qualifications, nor is a particular curriculum model mandatory, although schools will need to reflect the A8 and P8 performance measures in their curricula to demonstrate collective attainment and improvement.

Progress 8

The method is as follows:

1. A pupil's P8 score is their actual A8 score, minus their estimated A8 score. (the estimated A8 score is the average A8 score of all pupils nationally with the same prior attainment at KS2).

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2. The school's P8 score is the mean (average) of its pupils' P8 scores.

The KS2 prior attainment score is an average of a pupils KS2 English and mathematics results, in fine graded levels. From 2017 it will be calculated from KS2 reading and mathematics scores. When working out the KS2 baseline score, teacher assessment is used where no test scores exist, or where pupils at that stage were working below the level of the tests. Pupils without any end of KS2 assessments are excluded from the P8 calculation.

Pupils without any KS2 assessment are, however, included in the calculation of A8 scores for the school, unless they have arrived from a non-English speaking country in Y10 or Y11. The process of excluding these pupils from performance table calculations remains broadly the same as it has been for some years now with schools applying for them to be removed. Schools are still expected to be able to show parents (or OFSTED) the progress that these students have made since arriving in the school.

Confidence intervals around schools' P8 scores will also be provided. These indicate the upper and lower limits of what can be assumed from the P8 score and will be wider for a school with a small cohort than they are for a school with a large cohort. DfE guidance says that "both the Progress 8 score and the confidence interval for a school should be taken into account when comparing with other schools, pupil groups or national averages".

Secondary Floor Standard

The floor standard is the national expectation level below which schools should not fall. A school will fall below the new floor standard if their P8 score is below -0.5, indicating that the average achievement of a school's pupils is half a grade worse per subject than the national average of other pupils with the same prior attainment. Falling below this will trigger an Ofsted inspection.

Other future changes

The way GCSE is graded will also change. In 2017, new GCSE qualifications in English and mathematics, graded 1-9, will be included in performance tables, with others subjects changing to new GCSEs graded 1-9 in 2018 and 2019. Points allocated to these new GCSEs correspond to the new 1 to 9 grades, to try and keep things lined up, all unreformed GCSEs and equivalent qualifications will be mapped onto the 1-9 scale from 2017 onwards, with 8.5 being the maximum points available for unreformed GCSEs. The DfE felt this was better than the alternative of mapping new grades back to old. Tables giving old and new points scores can be found in Annex A of [Progress 8 school performance measure in 2016, 2017 and 2018](#).

The way KS2 is assessed has also changed from 2016 onwards. The results for 2016 were not reported in levels, but in scaled scores ranging from 80-120 with a score of 100 representing the expected standard. This means the results for 2016 are not comparable to those of previous years, and the way these results will be used to calculate a P8 measure will also need to change. These pupils will take GCSE in 2021, and the DfE will publish a revised methodology closer to the time.

The DfE has postponed its intended move to a system in 2019 in which schools are informed three years in advance about the results each pupil will require to achieve a positive Progress 8 score. There are concerns about the number of changes in analysis required throughout this period when so many other changes are being implemented. This lack of stability in the first few years of using the new measure is one of its drawbacks.

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Coasting Schools

Government guidance on [schools causing concern](#) says that the section on 'coasting' schools is not applicable until the 2016 school performance tables are published in early 2017. It does however say "A school will only be coasting if performance data falls below the coasting bar in all three previous years" and it proposes:

a) *interim measure for 2014 and 2015:*

"fewer than 60% of pupils achieve 5 or more A*-C grades including English and maths at GCSE and below the median percentage of pupils making expected progress in English and mathematics";

b) *full measure derived from school performance data from 2016:*

"where schools are performing below a level set against the new Progress 8 measure". It had previously proposed that "this level will be set in 2016 and will be above the absolute floor standard of -0.5".

Further guidance on this is expected as this year's secondary school performance tables data becomes clearer.

Comment

How fair is Progress 8 for schools?

The TES published an analysis by Education Datalab in March 2015 [Progress 8 isn't fair if pupils have low prior attainment](#) which showed that a measure that gives schools the opportunity to demonstrate progress for pupils of any ability (which is therefore 'fairer' than the previous key measure, is not actually neutral as it advantages schools with higher ability intakes. Possible reasons for this could be that higher achieving students come from more advantaged home backgrounds with extra support or 'cultural capital', and they therefore make better progress, or it could be that factors such as higher teacher turnover in more disadvantaged schools affect pupil progress. Progress 8 compares pupil performance with a national picture, rather than matching schools with similar intakes, which means that high-attaining pupils in a disadvantaged area are measured against all their peers rather than being compared to those in similarly disadvantaged areas.

This has implications for schools with deprived intakes as failing to reach the floor standard will leave them open to intervention and the possibility of forced academy conversion. Despite the bias, the ASCL described it as "the least bad measure so far" as it doesn't reward intake to the same extent that 5 GCSEs at grades A*-C (including English & maths) or Ebacc have, and a school's floor target is a function of the pupils it has, rather than an arbitrary threshold line to be crossed irrespective of intake.

The only real way to mitigate this would be to use more contextual measures (such as free school meals, Index of multiple deprivation scores, special educational needs, etc), in the methodology, but that would make an already complicated measure even more complex. Even doing this may not remove all the bias as, at whole school level, other value added measures have also been shown to advantage schools with higher levels of attainment. On balance, despite some issues, the new measure for schools is still seen as a significant improvement on what has gone before.

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How fair is Progress 8 for pupils?

An argument has also been made that the way GCSE old grades are translated into new ones is unfair and disadvantages the less able. Firstly, the maximum score available will be 8.5 rather than the 9 available for new GCSE courses, and secondly, as schools move from old GCSEs to new ones, the transitions are not even across all grades. As SchoolsWeek pointed out in [Progress 8: New measure undervalues low ability pupils](#) in March 2015 there is "a 1.5 point gain for a student who gets an A* rather than an A, while a less able student moving from a G to an F grade would gain only half a point". It is hard to know how significant these effects will be as the grade boundaries currently do not separate equal groups of students. This will, however, only be an issue as schools move from old to new GCSE syllabuses.

In a [response](#) to the National Association for Special Educational Needs (Nasen), the DfE said "we believe that the introduction of the Progress 8 measure is good news for pupils with SEND" as it ensures the outcomes of all pupils are important in the school performance measure. The DfE also pointed out that there is still no mandatory curriculum, and schools can still amend their curriculum model for special needs students if they think that is in their best interest. Annex A of the DfE guidance gives points scores for level 1 and level 2 qualifications in addition to GCSE and A/AS level. RAISEonline interactive will also allow school staff to look at P8 scores for SEN and other groups compared with their peers nationally.

Is it too complex?

"It's hard to calculate..... It's arcane, so very few stakeholders will understand it. I'm quite sure some parents will think -0.3 is better than +0.1 for example, and I'm pretty sure explaining statistical significance to them will be a non starter" is how the ASCL described it in [Five questions about Progress 8](#). Despite these reservations the ASCL position is that it is better than what went before.

Headguruteacher: [Progress 8: Looks like Data Garbage to me](#) (July 2015) criticises P8 because "we are assigning numbers to learning as if they are measurable to that degree and in that way.....we're not talking about children and what they've learned". In this view P8 has moved too far away from what students learn in classrooms. Despite these sentiments which will be shared by many teachers, most now accept that statistics can help to benchmark and understand practice, as long as they are used appropriately.

Most governors and leaders in schools already understand the statistics used to review performance in their school. They will nevertheless need to hone these skills with an understanding of the new methodology, and the concept of statistical significance. Schools may need to explore new ways of using national datasets available to them to benchmark their performance appropriately,

What are the implications for schools?

It is going to take time for P8 data for schools to emerge. Because P8 is a relative measure, it may not be sensible to use previous year estimates as a basis for target setting. Changes from year to year will not be known until after outcomes are published, A8 will be more predictable and may form a better basis for pupil and school level targets. The Fisher Family Trust and RAISEonline will continue to provide data at this level which will be helpful to schools.

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Changing curriculum models in order to maximise performance is more likely to be a marginal activity with P8 as it requires that everyone should follow a relatively balanced curriculum, and prioritise English and mathematics. In [Five questions about Progress 8](#) GL assessment suggest "there are only two things you can do to improve your Progress 8 score; enter pupils for subjects that match the subject mix in the measure; teach better". The implementation of Progress 8 may help schools to re-focus on things that they know will make a difference to students. These include teaching and learning strategies, attendance and other factors that affect learning such as student attitudes to learning, parent support or behaviour and ethos in the school. If this happens the move to a more complex statistical measure may have benefits for teachers and learners.

Charts cross referencing A8 and P8 figures are still likely to form the basis for defining which schools are coasting, and for local authorities (LAs) or regional school commissioners (RSCs) to make the promised 'rounded decision' about the need to intervene. If these two figures are cross referenced and national average and/or floor target figures drawn, 4 quadrants will appear. Schools that are above average on A8 scores, but below average or below floor target on P8 scores may find they are invited to discuss their performance further with the LA or RSC.

External Links

DfE: [Progress 8 school performance measure in 2016, 2017 and 2018](#) (September 2016)

GL Assessment: [Five questions about Progress 8](#) (September 2016)

Education Datalab: [Do you really need to wait to calculate Progress 8?](#) (August 2016)

Nasen: [Concerns about Progress 8](#) (May 2016)

TES: [Progress 8 isn't fair if pupils have low prior attainment](#) (March 2016)

Headguruteacher: [Progress 8: Looks like Data Garbage to me](#) (July 2015)

SchoolsWeek: [Progress 8: New measure undervalues low ability pupils](#) (March 2015)

Related Briefings

[Education in England: progress and goals -CentreForum report](#) (February 2016)

[English Baccalaureate implementation – DfE consultation](#) (December 2015)

[DfE consultation – Intervening in failing, underperforming and coasting schools](#) (November 2015)

[Coasting Schools: Draft regulations](#) (July 2015)

[Coasting Schools – a literature review](#) (June 2015)

[Primary and 16-19 accountability – DfE response](#) (May 2014)

[Secondary school accountability reform: DfE response](#) (November 2013)

For further information, please visit www.lgiu.org.uk or email john.fowler@lgiu.org.uk