

Progress 8 cannot be calculated for 2025 and 2026, and any proxy measure is likely to be a poor substitute

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About the research

Progress 8 is the Department for Education's (DfE) headline secondary school accountability measure, and Progress 8 scores are published annually in national school performance tables.

Progress 8 scores summarise the average progress students made in each school between their age 11 Key Stage 2 (KS2) tests and their age 16 GCSE examinations.

For example, the 2023 Progress 8 scores summarise the progress made by students who took their KS2 tests in 2018 and their GCSE examinations in 2023.

Progress 8 scores cannot be calculated for the 2025 and 2026 GCSE examination cohorts as they did not take KS2 tests in 2020 and 2021 due to the cancellation of these tests because of COVID-19.

The DfE must decide what to do. Abandon Progress 8 for two years? Or replace Progress 8 with a proxy measure?

In terms of the latter, the most obvious proxy measure is to summarise the average progress students made in each school between their age 7 Key Stage 1 (KS1) tests and their GCSE examinations.

Our research explores how successful this might be by reanalysing the 2019 Progress 8 scores, as this is the last pre-COVID-19 cohort that took both KS1 and KS2 tests, allowing proxy scores to be compared to actual scores.

Policy recommendations

- Don't publish Progress 8 in 2025 and 2026. Progress 8 was not published for 2020 and 2021 as these cohorts did not take GCSE examinations due to COVID-19, so not publishing Progress 8 in 2025 and 2026, as these cohorts did not take KS2 tests, is also a reasonable response.
- Take advantage of not being able to calculate Progress 8 in 2025 and 2026 as a natural opportunity to consult more generally regarding the optimal path forward for government school accountability measures and school performance tables.
- If a proxy Progress 8 measure is published, give it a different name to prevent incorrect user interpretations and comparisons with normal years, provide health warnings regarding its limitations, and consider restricting use to school self-evaluation.



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Key findings

Replacing missing KS2 scores with KS1 scores will result in proxy Progress 8 scores which are more extreme than normal and will notably reorder schools in the national school performance tables.

- The number of “well below average” and “well above average” banded schools would double from 5 to 10 percent.
- One third of schools would change their apparent Progress 8 banding.
- One-fifth of schools would move in the national school performance table by 500 or more places.
- It will therefore be misleading to refer to these proxy scores as Progress 8 scores.

More generally, replacing missing KS2 scores with KS1 scores is conceptually problematic because it extends the period over which secondary schools are judged to nine years of student progress, but only five of these take place during secondary schooling.

- Schools’ proxy Progress 8 scores will then reflect a murky mix of the efforts of the primary schools which feed each secondary school and secondary schools themselves.
- Therefore, proxy Progress 8 scores are problematic when it comes to holding schools accountable or aiding school choice, regardless of how they are presented.

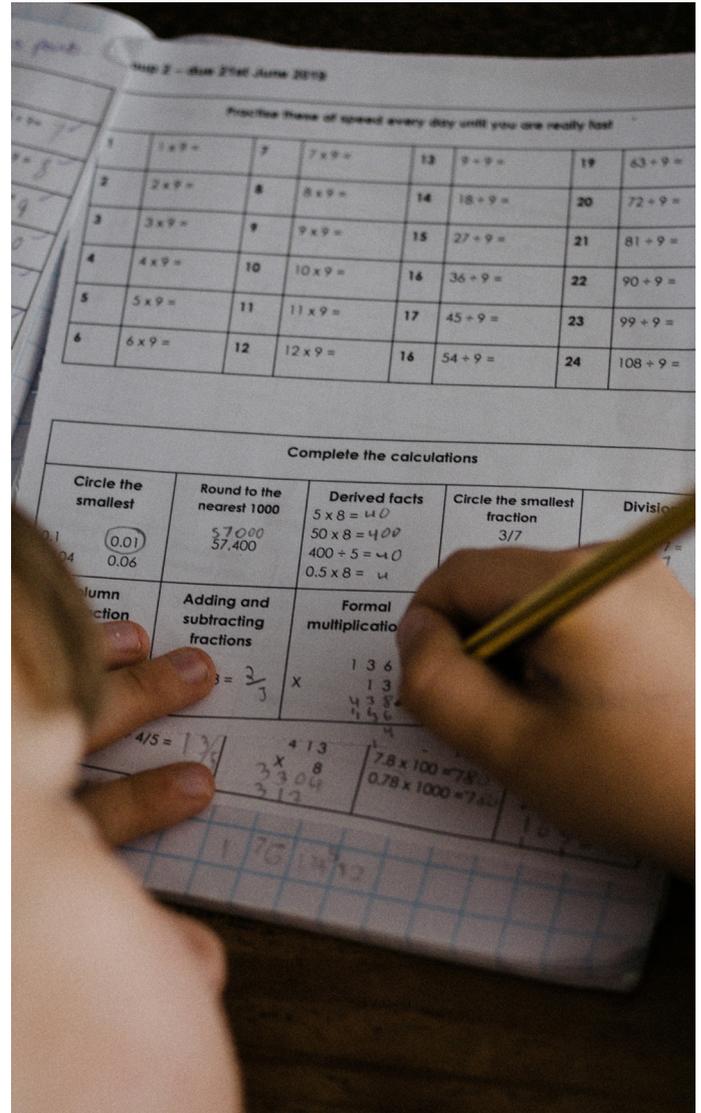


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Further information

The [journal article](#) that this work is based on is published in School Effectiveness and School Improvement.

We provide a more general critique of Progress 8 in a [second journal article](#) published in the Review of Education.

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