



Learning in England ∞ League Tables

30 > What is the value of League Tables?

League Tables present data about academic results at GCSE and A Level for different types of schools. The schools at the top of the Table have children with the best academic results. Schools may lie in different places in the League Table each year. To make the League Tables ‘fairer’ there are different categories: boys only, or girls only, or coeducational schools. Day schools and Boarding schools are also in different categories.

Depending on who is collating the tables, the number of pupils may also need to be shown. It is not considered fair to include schools which enter less than ten pupils.

Parents should be aware that not all schools wish to be measured through League Tables and therefore do not submit the data from their school to the agency creating the Tables. The Tables are usually collated in November or December, when re-marked papers have been taken into account.

The value of League Tables lies in giving a quick view of where the schools stand in relation to one another, in terms of academic achievement. Inevitably, the schools at the top are full, so they can be highly selective. Top schools may have as many as two or three children applying for each place.

“Parents love League Tables.”¹

League Tables are a rough tool and have considerable limitations. **They will not be measuring the success of schools in other ways:**

- > the value added – how the teachers teach the pupils, so they achieve better results than when predicted at aged 11 or 13
- > where the pupils go when they leave: to University or Apprenticeships, for example. Children who aspire to be doctors or lawyers and other academically professions can still have access even if they have not been to top schools
- > the preparation of the children for the responsibilities, experiences and opportunities of adult life, through the extra-curricular programme and daily routines

¹ <https://www.privateschools.co/league-tables>



- > the development of soft skills such as speaking and listening, creative thinking, problem-solving, teamwork and conflict resolution
- > the well-being and happiness of the children.

As a former teacher, I am aware of how each cohort of pupils can be different. It was a mystery to me, as a Philosophy teacher, why one group would readily grasp a concept and a second group would struggle, so I had to revisit the concept in a different way. Another example: one year the results in Science and Maths may be superb at GCSE, but less good say in English or Languages. You may expect that same cohort of pupils to achieve at the same standard at A Level. Another mystery – why should a large group of children achieve in this way. The reasons are not always obvious. When they are, teachers modify their teaching.

It seems odd that results can go up and down in each subject, even by small amounts and can affect the place in the League Tables, significantly. The factors are wide ranging, including *inter alia*:

- > changes in syllabuses
- > changes in styles of learning
- > changes of teachers, in a school
- > changes in the style of assessment
- > supplementary support whether in the form of Learning Support or extra resources and trips which reinforce the learning.

This information document would not be complete without mention of the **PISA tests**, which are another way of **measuring academic achievement**, as oppose to education, in schools. This Programme for International Student Assessment [PISA] is run by the OECD. The tests are undertaken by about 50,000 children, aged 15, in each country, every three years. Results are eagerly awaited! You will not be surprised to learn, even with the reputation in the UK for very ‘good education,’ that it is ranked in the 20s for Reading and Maths and 15 for Science, last time. The top 10 countries are mostly Asian.

Inevitably, politicians want to ‘raise standards,’ so the teachers teach for the test, rather than give the children a good all-round education. Educationalists have been highly critical of the PISA tests [and indeed League Tables]. The letter at this reference, from educationalists, explains their concerns:

<https://www.theguardian.com/education/2014/may/06/oecd-pisa-tests-damaging-education-academics>.

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Surely the best education for my child is at a school at the top of the League Tables?

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“A highly academic school is not necessarily the right environment for many children. Parents need to bear in mind that schools lower down the tables may provide an **equally exceptional** education but cater for a wider ability range.”

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