



## UNDERSTANDING THE SCHOOL LEAGUE TABLES

### Background

The school league tables measure the attainment and achievement of pupils in all schools. The tables are published annually by Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) with information available as far back as 1994. The information is available from the DCSF website: [www.dcsf.gov.uk](http://www.dcsf.gov.uk). A number of national papers analyse and publish the results of the league tables to coincide with the time examination results are released to students.

The league tables provide a lot of valuable information on how schools have been performing over the years against those in their borough and compared with the national average. This information provided by the league tables needs to be combined with information from other sources such as the Ofsted reports to really understand how a school is performing.

The information from the league table on its own would not provide you with enough information to find the ideal school for your children; you need to take other factors into consideration such as the suitability of the school for your children's interests and abilities.

### How the tables have changed over the years

League tables published before 2004 revealed only the percentage of passes at the relevant Key Stage level e.g. KS4 (GCSE). It was widely believed that this method of measuring school meant that schools in the leafy suburbs were always at the top whilst struggling inner-city schools remained perpetually at the bottom as the outcomes were deemed to be heavily dependent on the prior attainment and family background of the students.

Since 2004 the league tables have provided other measures such as the value-added results and contextual value-added results (CVA) for example the percentage of students with special needs in addition to the percentage of passes.

### How to make the league tables work for you

#### 1. Understand the ranking system

Read the small print to understand the basis upon which the tables were published by the different newspapers/websites as they may rank the same school differently even when using the same exam results.

#### 2. Understand the method for comparison

Comparing the results for a particular school over a number of years needs to be done with the understanding that the methods of measuring the attainment levels have changed. For example the points systems used for both the GCSE and A level results pre 2003 are different from the current systems.

**What gets measured gets done...**

#### 3. What are your objectives

It is important to establish upfront what your objectives are. Individual goals may differ, for example some people may want to know the top 100 schools in England whilst others may want to find out which borough/county has the best exam results. Yet still the aim may be to compare a few schools against each other, know if the school up your street meets your expectations or to ascertain if a particular school has consistently attained a certain level of achievement over a number of years. Despite all the criticisms levied against the league tables and the added complexities built in most of these objectives are achievable.

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The most consistent element over the years has been the raw scores so it is advisable to understand what the raw scores mean when viewing the tables. At best the other elements (e.g. value added, CVA etc.) are useful for understanding the demographic background of the school; at worst they can be misleading as the *most improved school* on a league table may be a school with raw scores well below the national average! It is pertinent to note that whilst some of these other elements of measurement are useful they do not address the key questions that most parents want answered i.e. "how well did school X perform in the GCSEs and how did their performance compare with that of other schools?"

### What do the GCSE Scores mean?

Currently the key GCSE level indicator is the proportion of pupils attaining the equivalent of 5 or more GCSEs at grades A\* to C including English and Maths. Prior to 2006 the indicator did not specify English and Maths as subjects that must be measured.

## UNDERSTANDING THE SCHOOL LEAGUE TABLES (CONTINUED)

Most league tables provide the average score per pupil in addition to the percentage of A\* to C passes. This average is based on the points system, details of which can be found in the code cracker section on page 4. Even though the points system has changed it is still relatively straightforward to compare GCSE results over a few years especially when you know the allocated points per grade for each of the pre and post 2003 eras

In some ways the average point score per pupil could indeed be a better indicator than the proportion of A\* to C passes as the following illustration reveals.

School Y could have 100% achievement of 5 A\* to C grades per pupil but the results may consist largely of C and B grades. An experienced user of the league tables will be able to guess this mix of grades as it will be reflected in an average point score per pupil.

Effectively most pupils from this 'very successful' school may not be able to gain admission to

### A and AS Level Raw Scores

The same logic applies to the A and AS level league tables. In the past few years, the league tables have used the UCAS points system but from 2007 this has changed to the QCA system. Even though the points system is now different, as long as the allocated points per grade for the pre and post 2006 periods are known, the tables can be reasonably interpreted and com-



pared. Details of the old and new A levels' points systems can also be found in the code cracker section on page 4.

In the past it was easy to check the average points per pupil against the admission criteria of a particular university as the points system was similar. However from 2007 a comparison of the new points to the UCAS tariff will be required in order to know how the A level results of a school measure up. The top universities' admission criteria often require minimum A level grades ranging from a combination of 1A & 2Bs to 3As. In 2007 these combinations will translate to 750 points and 810 points respectively

It is important to note that the top universities do not grant places purely on A level grades alone. Other dynamics such as the applicant's GCSE results, personal statement and interview performance are also taken into consideration.

### Other Considerations

This article only analyses the raw scores, a whole book is probably required if all aspects of

the league tables are to be covered. Even then there are many other factors to consider when using the raw score information. For example the results are stated in percentages and averages which sometimes may lead to misinterpretation.

Consider the following GCSE league table information:

School A has got 100% (5 A\* to C grades) whilst School B has got a 98 % attainment of the same grades. In actual fact in each of the schools one pupil did not achieve 5 A\* to C grades. The schools however end up with different percentages because School A has 200 pupils (i.e. 199 passes equates to 99.5% which then gets rounded to 100%) but School B has only 50 pupils (i.e. 49 passes equates to 98%).

### Crunch Time

Against the backdrop of all this information what would your conclusion be? Do the league tables provide valuable information? Is the number crunching required for interpretation worth it? Would you use the league tables in your decision making process in future? The answers to the above will probably vary but the one consistent thing we hope to have achieved is this; if you choose to use the tables in future, you will be making informed assessments and judgments based on an insightful analysis of the data provided.

- Bunmi Adekeye and Dayo Amusu

**Coming Soon:  
Top Universities'  
Admission Criteria**

the top A level schools as they would not have met the top schools' minimum entry criteria which consists mainly of A\*, A, and some B grades.

This is not to undermine School Y's achievement but it is important to be able to make an informed and better comparison when analysing the results of a number of schools that have all attained 100% passes.

## READERS' CORNER - BLACK HISTORY MONTH WITH IJAPA AND THE PIG

Black History Month has been celebrated across the UK every October for over 30 years, each year growing from strength to strength. Black History Month is a time when we highlight and celebrate the achievements of the black community and uncover hidden history about our communities. The primary aims are to:

Promote knowledge of Black History and experience

Disseminate information on positive Black contributions to British Society

Heighten the confidence and awareness of Black people in their cultural heritage.

Can I encourage you to celebrate the Black History by reading the Tales about Ijapa stories with your children.

The Tales about Ijapa series entertains, stimulates and aims to broaden the mind of the reader whilst chronicling the antics of Ijapa in the animal kingdom. Each story in the series has morals and lessons to learn and some of the lessons are identified within each story.

The Tales about Ijapa series also supports the objectives of **Lest we Forget**, a voluntary organisation with the primary aim of promoting the knowledge and awareness of the African culture primarily to children born in the West with interest in the African culture.

**Ijapa**, the main character in the story, is a tortoise. He is not your ordinary lack lustre tortoise though. He is a very cunning fellow and can be very clever too. He is known to have brought the downfall of mighty animals such as the Elephant; even the Lion is very wary of him. He is however often lazy and greedy and this tends to bring about his downfall. His antics in the animal kingdom are filled with lessons for all.

**Ijapa and the Pig** is a beautiful, well illustrated book that tells the story of why the Pig plays about in muddy areas. In **Ijapa and the Pig**, the ever lazy and cunning Ijapa continues his antics by playing a dirty trick on the Pig with lasting consequences. The story is as much entertaining as it is enlightening and it is bound to stimulate the imagination of the younger readers and perhaps cause the older ones to weigh and consider.

If you do not have yet have a copy, may I encourage you to visit [www.amazon.co.uk](http://www.amazon.co.uk) to purchase your copy of the latest publication **Ijapa and the Pig**

-Lolade Onabolu



To contribute an article to the next issue of The Smart Kid, send your email to [info@thesmartkid.org](mailto:info@thesmartkid.org)

## SPENDING QUALITY TIME WITH YOUR TODDLER

Ideally we would all love to spend quality and quantity time with our toddlers but with the busy lives we lead, this is not always possible. So I advocate, some time with your toddler is better than no time at all. The secret is to ensure that the moments you have together are ones of communication, love and bonding

### The family that work together, stay together

The house is a mess, the dishes need doing, the laundry basket is spilling over, there's enough dust to write a thesis in and the family need feeding. On top of that, your toddler demands your attention. Combining the two is not as difficult as you might think and it is fulfilling for you as well as the child.

Dusting - Give your child a dry rag and guide him/her to a cleaned off coffee table or dresser to dust.

Baking - after measuring everything out, let your toddler pour the ingredients in as you stir. They can also help you put things away when you are through.

Shopping – Use this opportunity to develop your child's vocabulary, counting and memory skills.

You can count on these chores taking you longer, but by spending time with your children in this way, you are, in fact, teaching them how to behave and giving them essential life skills.

### Routine Time

Experts say that routine creates a comforting environment for your child that makes them feel safe and loved. Devoting one hour each day (or how ever much time you can spare of your undivided attention) to create some routine into your child's schedule is very

important.

Meal times and bath times are the most obvious and easiest examples of establishing routine and consistency.

Eating – A perfect time to teach your child manners and social skills. How to use cutlery correctly, not talking with their mouth full, or reaching across other people's plates.

Bath times - There are a wealth of toys and games that you can use to enhance your child's bath time. My favourites are foam letters and numbers. Sold in many pound shops, these versatile, waterproof, floating numbers and letters are not just fun but educational for your toddler. You can also make your own by cutting out shapes and letters from new kitchen sponges or from craft foam. - Yemisi Gibbons

To receive future copies of this free newsletter send an email to [info@thesmartkid.org](mailto:info@thesmartkid.org)

## CODE CRACKER

Every year the Department for Education and Skills publishes information on the achievement and attainment of pupils in all schools. These tables provide a guide to how well a school is doing. They list National Curriculum test results for each school in England and show how they compare with other schools.



There are **four** tables published each year:

**Key Stage 2 (KS2) tables** - with Key Stage 2 test results for all state primary schools in England. Testing against KS2 targets take place at age 11; KS2 comprises English, Mathematics and Science testing at Levels 3 to 5.

**Key Stage 3 (KS3) tables** - with Key Stage 3 test results for all state secondary schools in England. Testing against KS3 targets takes place at age 14; KS3 comprises English testing at Levels 4 to 7, Mathematics testing at Levels 3 to 8 and Science testing at Levels 3 to 7.

**Key Stage 4 (KS4) tables** - with results for GCSEs and equivalent qualifications. Testing against KS4 targets, that is, GCSE or equivalent external examinations, takes place at age 16.

**post-16 tables** - with results in general and vocational AS and A levels, Key Skills at level 3, Advanced Extension Awards, other advanced vocational qualifications and intermediate vocational qualifications.

Source: [www.direct.gov.uk](http://www.direct.gov.uk)

Testing against Key Stage 1 (KS1) targets takes place at age 7; KS1 comprises testing at Levels 1 to 3 in English and Mathematics. Note however that tables are not published for the KS1 results.



### GCSE Grades:

Grade	Old Points	New Points
A*	8	58
A	7	52
B	6	46
C	5	40
D	4	34
E	3	28
F	2	22
G	1	16

For short courses divide the points by two for example an A\* grade in a short course using the new points system will be 29 points.



### A level Grades:

Grade	Old Points	New Points
A	120	270
B	100	240
C	80	210
D	60	180
E	40	150

The AS grades are worth half their equivalent at A level for example an A grade at AS level in the new points system is 135 points.

Source: [www.dcsf.gov.uk](http://www.dcsf.gov.uk)

### Contextual Value Added (CVA)

This score compares the achievements of

pupils nationally who had the same or similar attainment in their test results at age 10 or 11. It predicts what a given child's attainment should be based on the actual attainment of other children with similar prior attainment and similar backgrounds. The idea is that how they actually performed - better or worse than the others - is down to the school's influence.



CVA includes the **nine factors** below which are known to affect pupils' attainment but are outside a school's control:

Gender, Special Educational Needs, Ethnicity, Eligible for Free School Meals, First Language, Mobility, Age, In Care and IDACI (a postcode-based deprivation measure)

The DCSF expected median score is 1000.

Care has to be taken when reading the rankings, with no great significance being read into small differences.

There are no CVA scores for independent schools.

**The Smart Kid is an organisation formed to empower 21<sup>st</sup> century parents in the UK by sharing vital information and motivating them to take positive action for their children. We expect that the parents who contact us will go on to share the information with their peers, friends and family thus empowering one another. These gradual but consistent efforts will produce a shift in the culture and value system in the UK. Our vision is that previously untapped ability, lying dormant in a sizeable proportion of the population, will be discovered thus creating a more productive society where the best opportunities are no longer restricted to the realm of a select few. Thanks for taking the time to read this and we hope you share our dream for all children in the UK.**

*The*



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