Inspecting how schools provide for their more able pupils

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Ofsted’s ‘most able’ survey

The 'policy history'

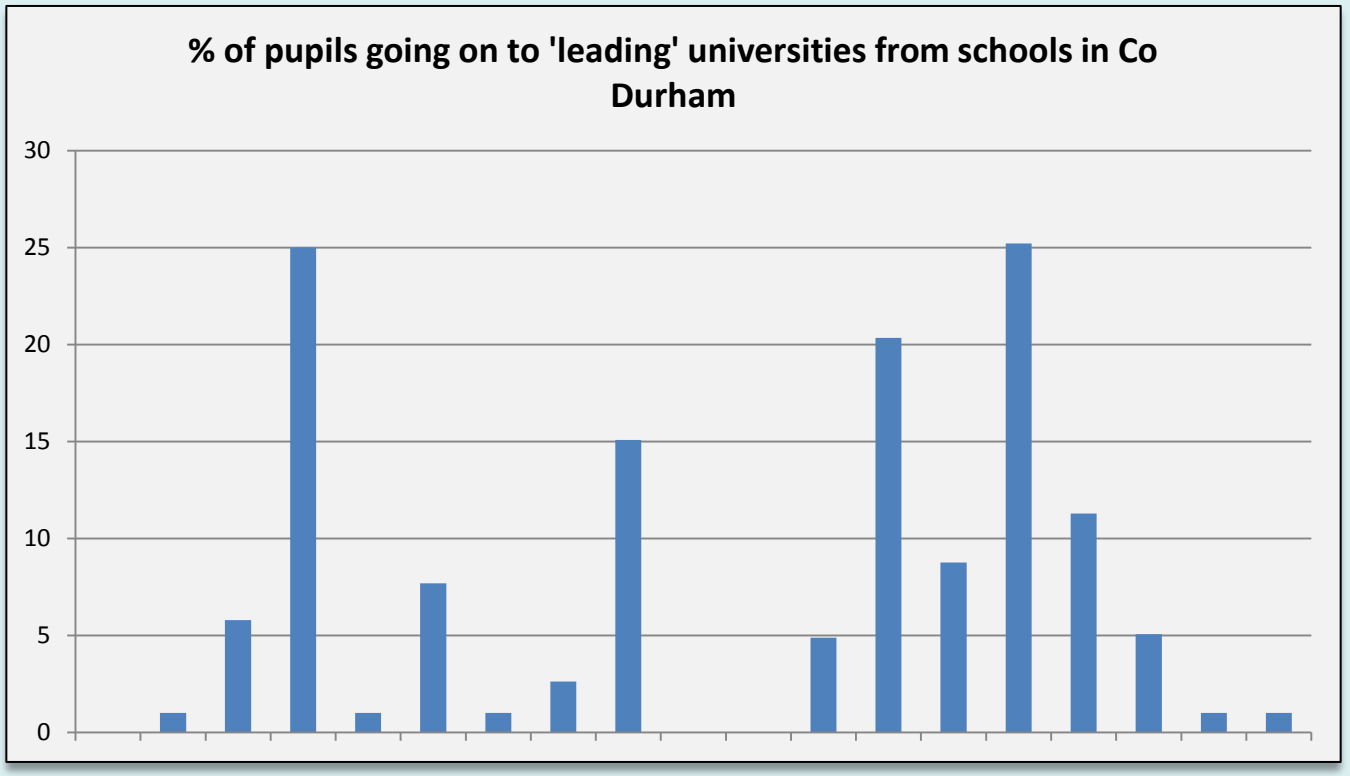
Policy has been confused by terminology – what do we call them:
More able/very able/gifted/talented/bright…….

Energy has been used in setting up national schemes for the 'gifted and talented' with an 'outreach' approach – did this create an 'add on' mentality?

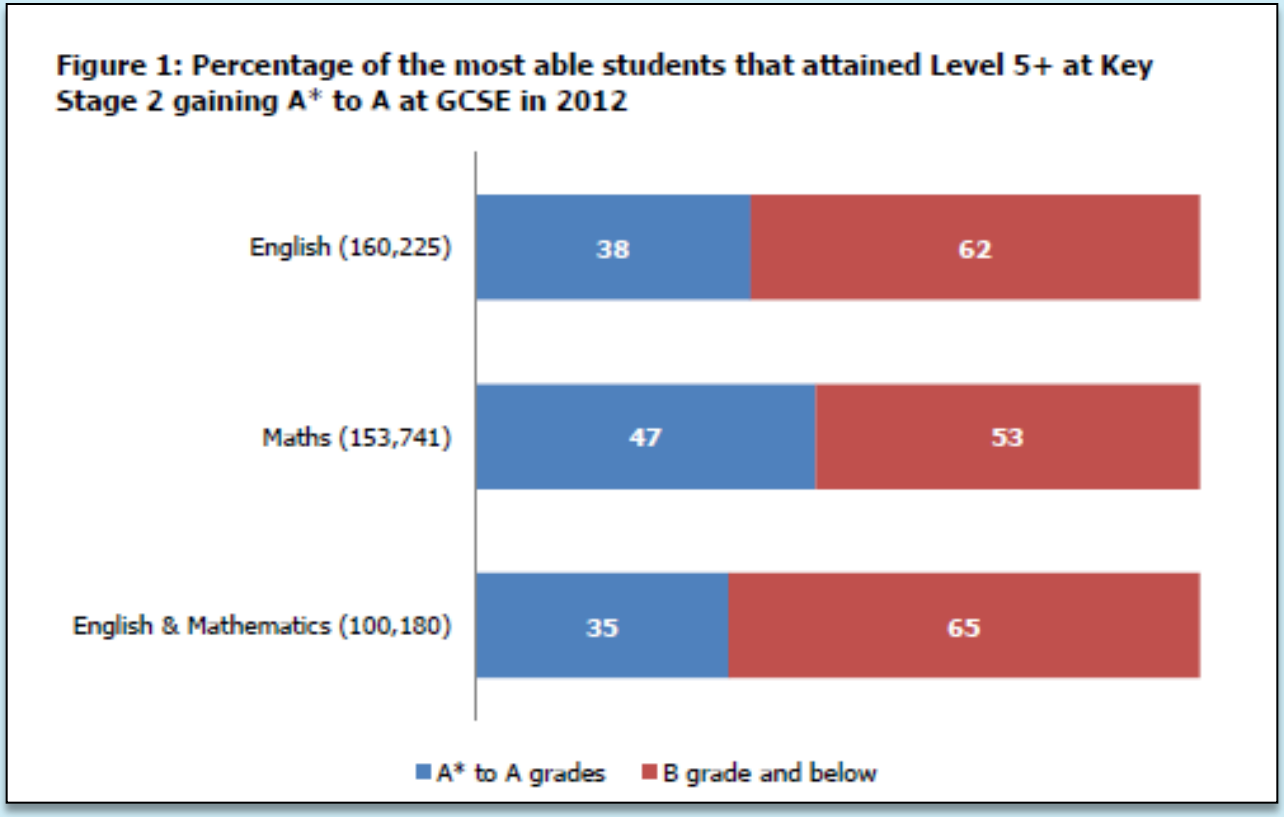
Debates about the best methods – should we be setting up summer schools, adding to the 'local' curriculum, having more selective schools or improving classroom teaching?

The debate about access to the 'best universities' for able but disadvantaged children has made the issue more high profile recently

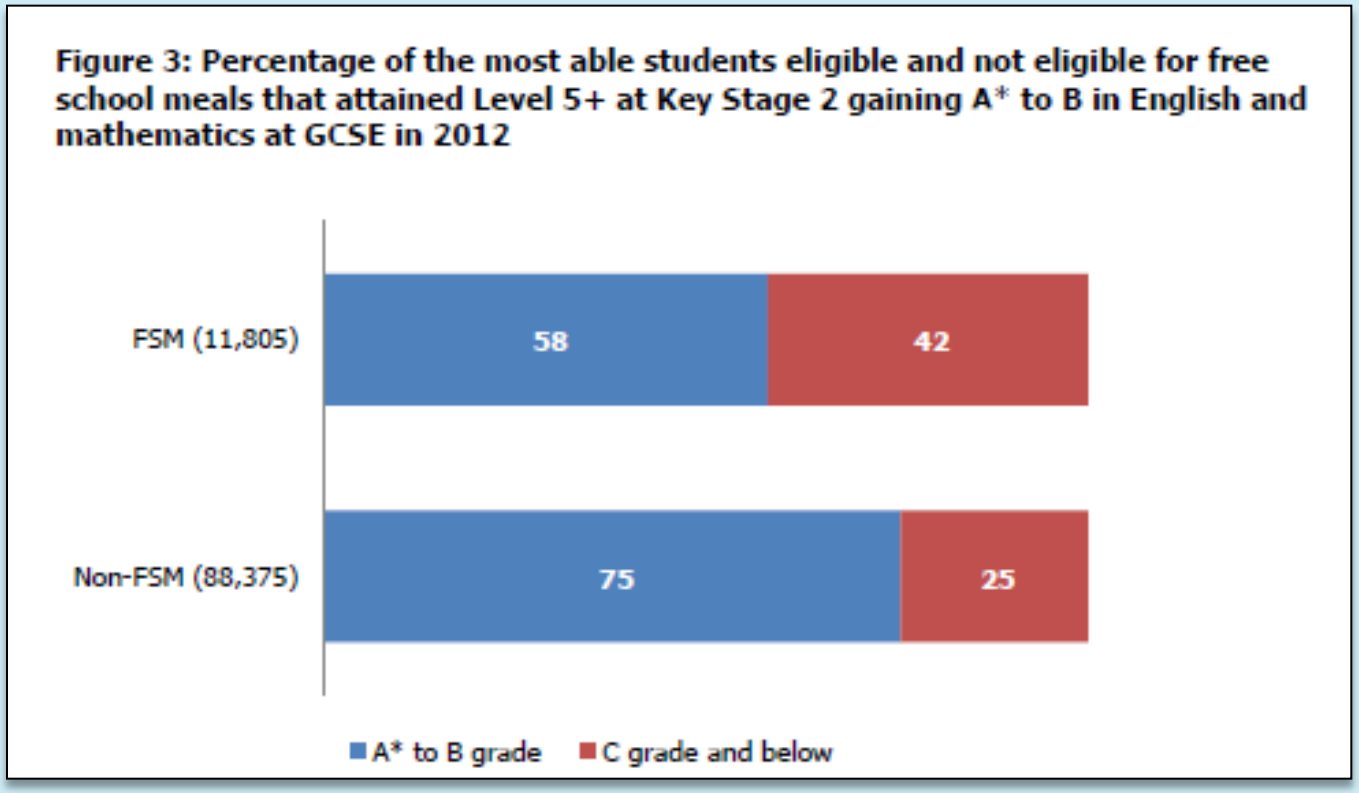
There has been great interest in whether all schools promote access to leading universities:



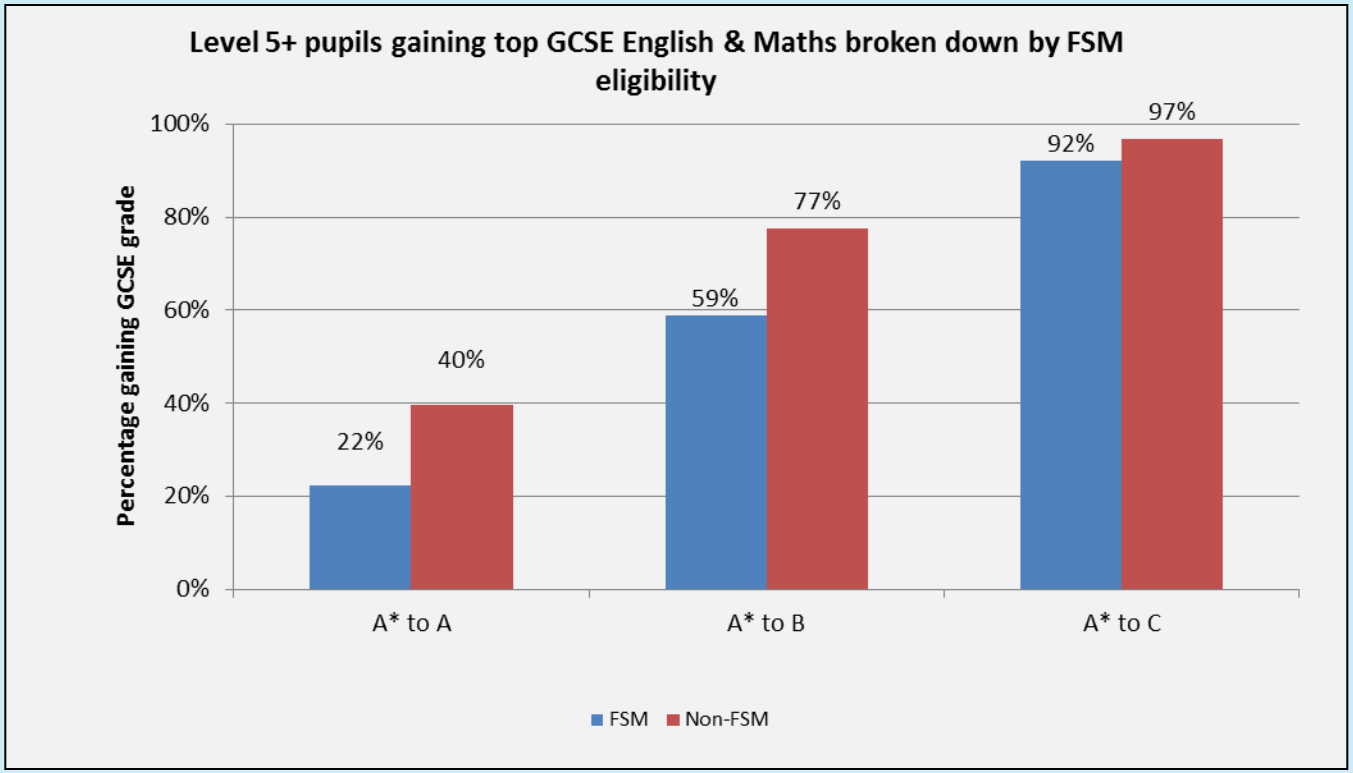
Too many pupils who showed ability in Key Stage 2 are not meeting expectations at age 16:



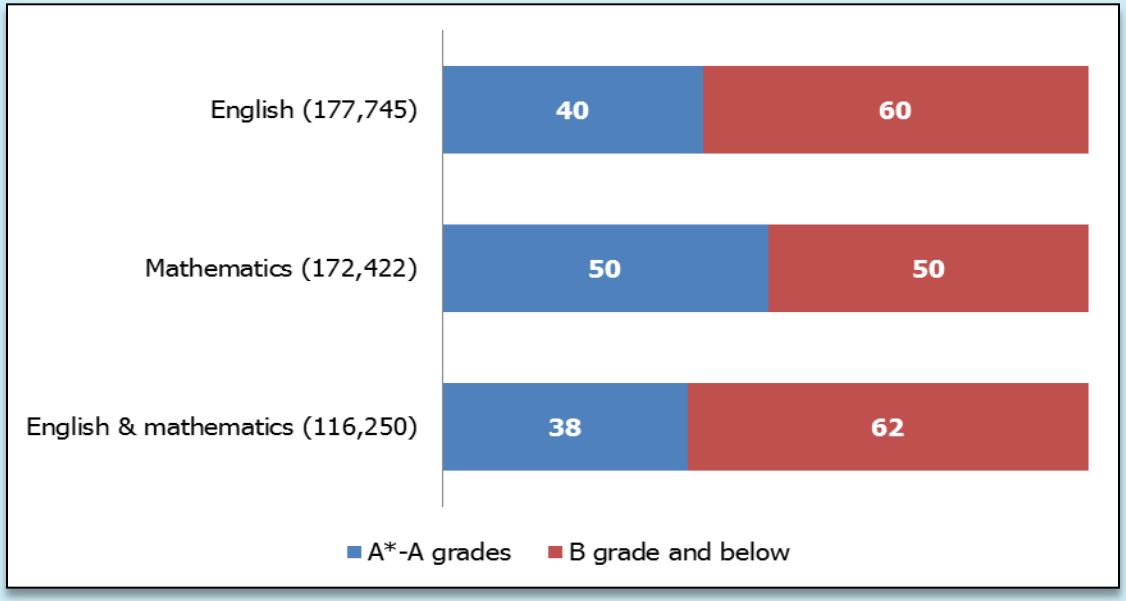
The problem of lack of progress appears to affect the disadvantaged especially by age 11:



High ability pupils from deprived backgrounds do poorly compared to the more advantaged at age 16:

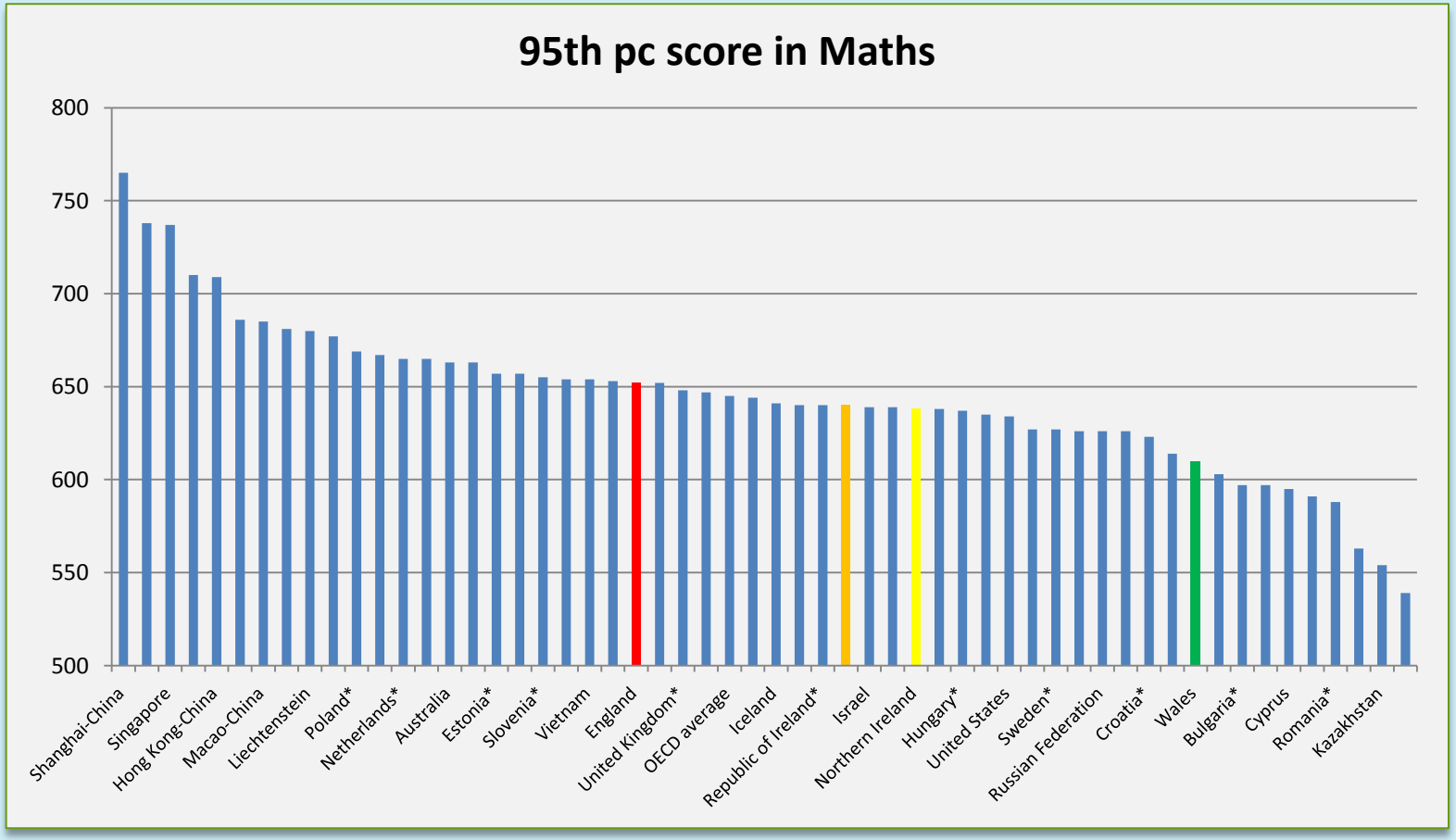


Too few high ability pupils get the top grades in English and maths:



Two-fifths, 40%, of the brightest students attained the highest GCSE A*-A levels in English, with 50% achieving these levels in mathematics.
In English and mathematics combined, just 38% attained the highest levels.

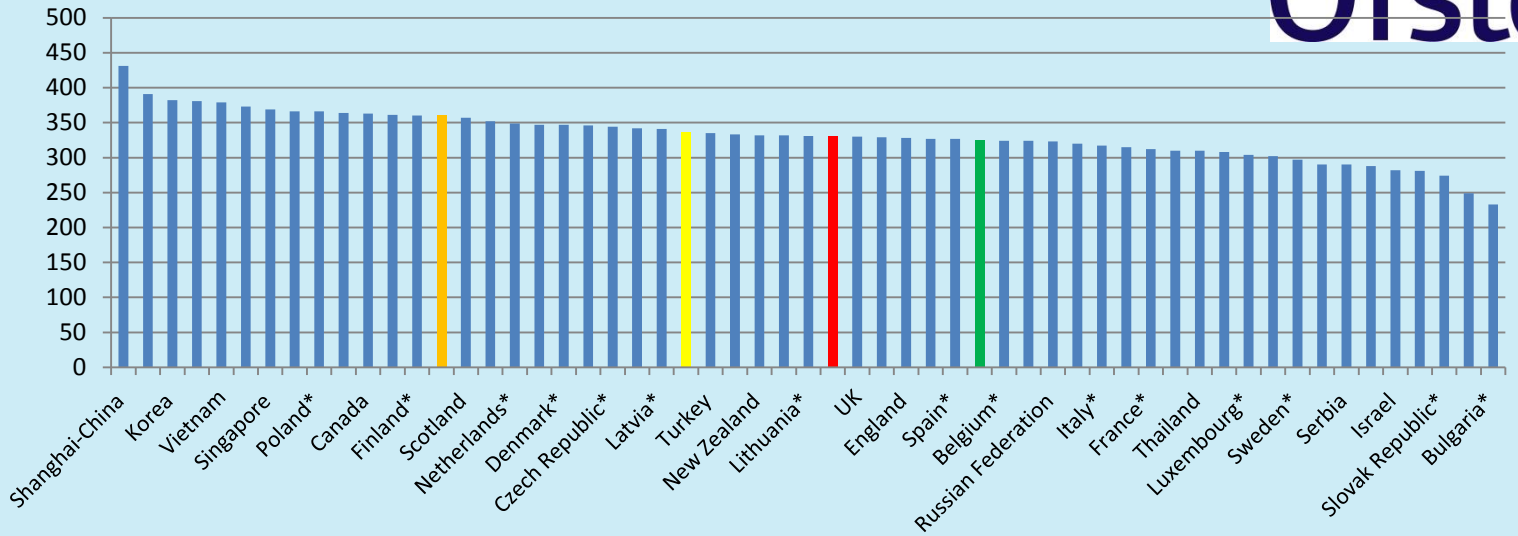
England's brightest do better than the other UK countries but lag far behind the East...



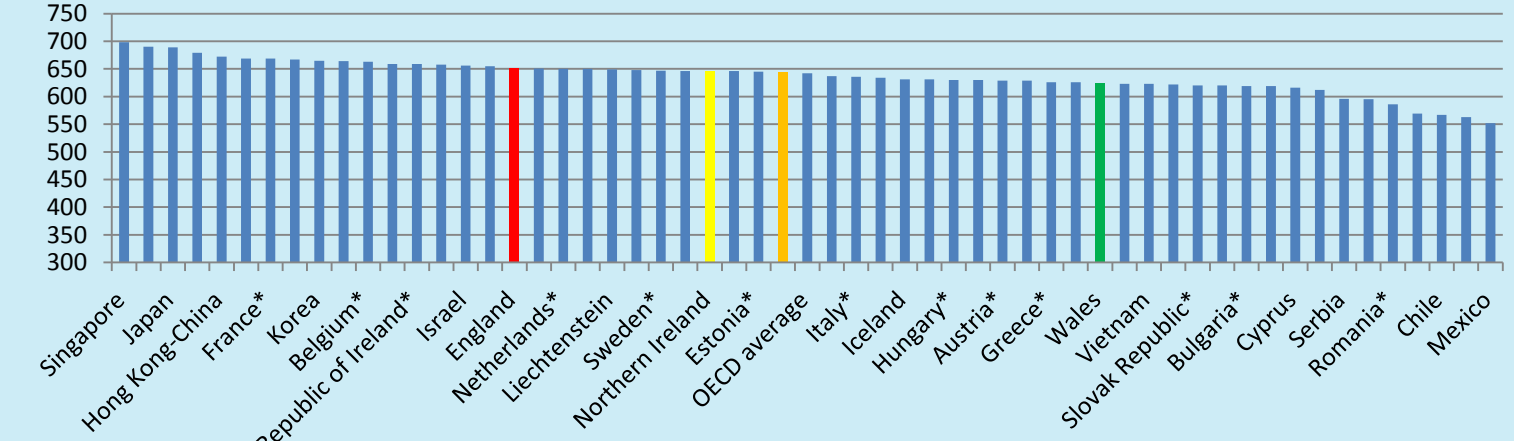
Switzerland, Belgium, Poland and Germany lead Europe on this measure.

England | Scotl'd | Wales | N Irel'd

Reading: 5th PC score

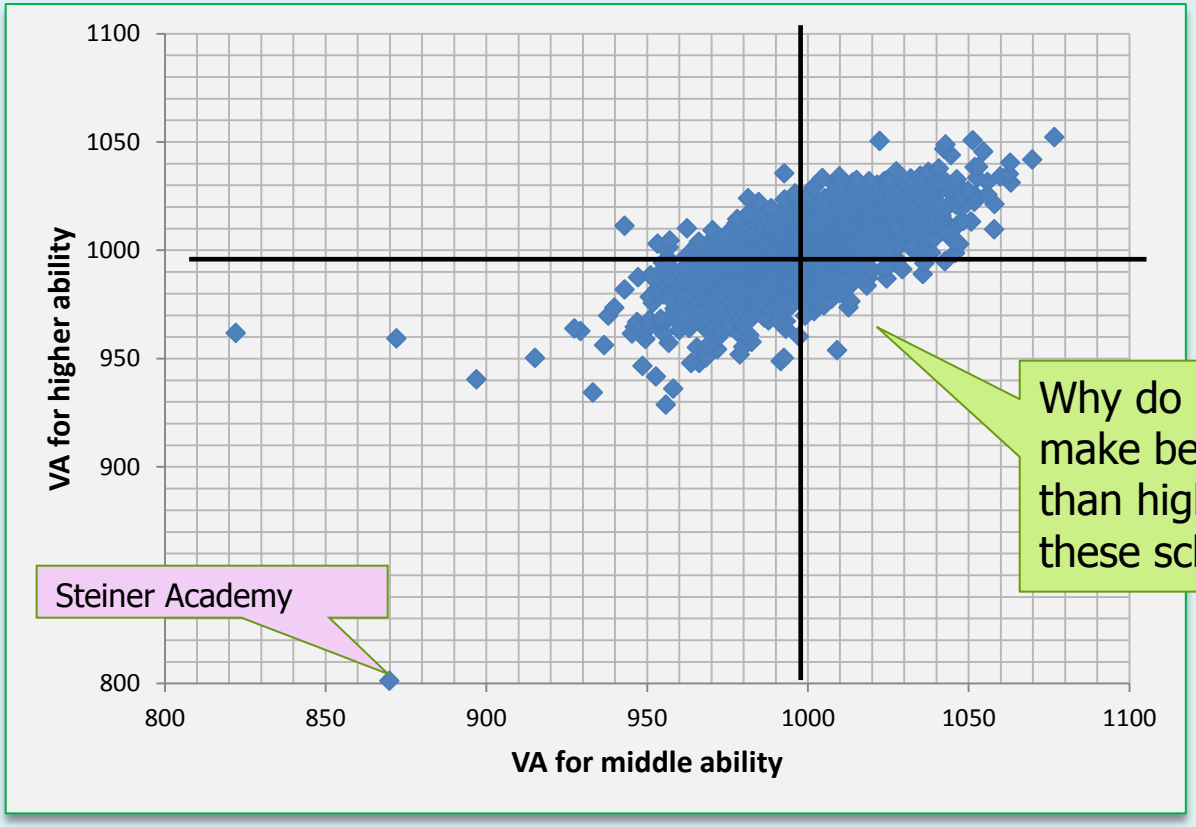


Reading: 95th PC



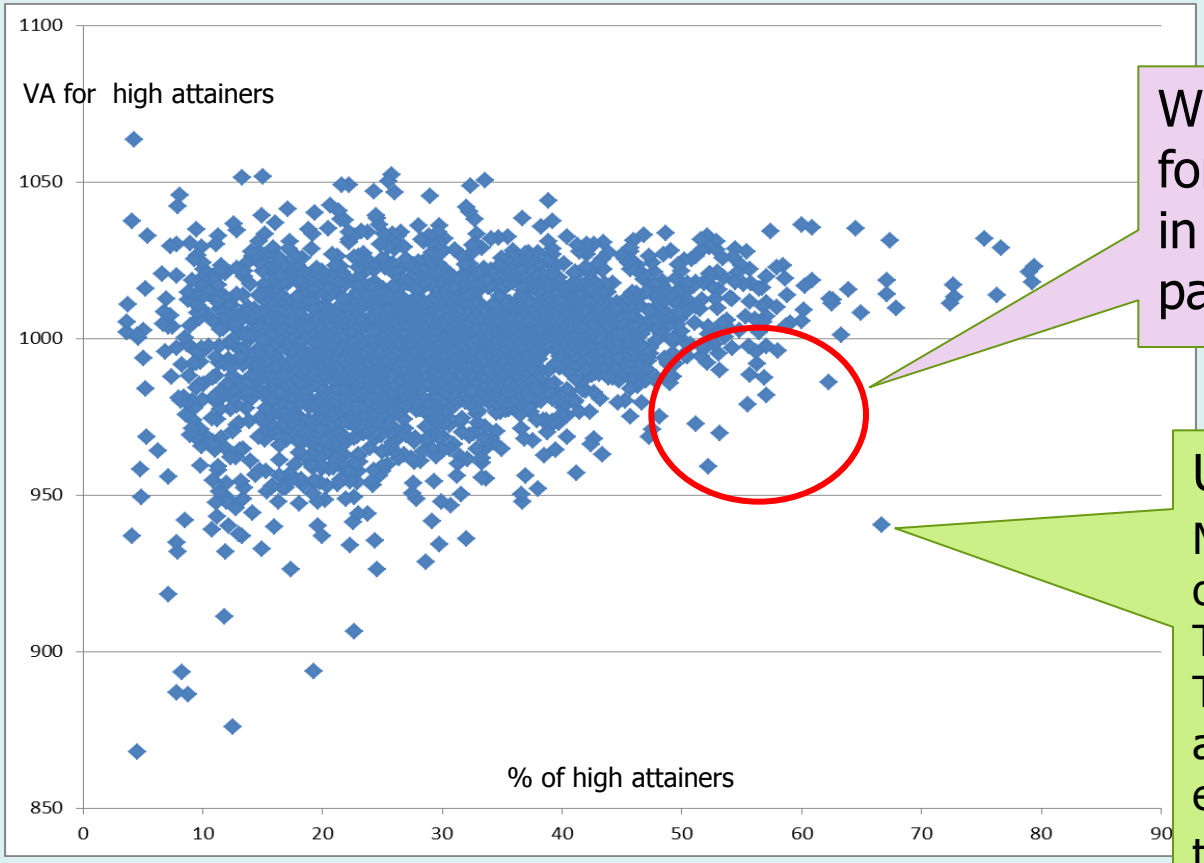
Reading: better at the top than bottom

In most schools, if middle-attainers do well, so do the more-able. There are exceptions, however.



Plot of overall 2013 VA scores: middle-attainers against high-attainers, 'best 8' subjects, non-selective secondary schools

In most schools, where there are lots of higher-attaining pupils, they tend to do well. Not in all schools though…..



What is the story for more-able pupils in schools in this part of the diagram?

URN 137498

Maharishi Free School, opened September 2011. The curriculum includes Transcendental Meditation and 'consciousness-based education' as well as traditional subjects.

Plot of overall 2013 VA scores: proportion of high-attainers in the school (x-axis) against high-attainers VA, 'best 8' subjects, non-selective secondary schools

Ofsted's 'Most Able' Survey has looked at the top 5%:

Key Question 1: Are the most able students in secondary schools achieving as well as they should?

Key Question 2: Why is there such disparity in admissions to Russell Group universities between a small number of mainly independent schools and the majority of comprehensive schools?

'Ability or potential in one or more academic subjects; the top 5% of students in school as measured by actual or potential achievement in English, mathematics, science, history, geography, modern foreign languages, religious education, information and communication technology, or design technology.' (DfE definition of gifted)

Most Able Survey

- Was partly prompted by concerns about international comparisons
- Focused mainly on 47 secondary schools
- Was informed by other studies, eg Sutton Trust on social mobility
- Took note of research elsewhere, especially in the US
- Looked closely at the primary – secondary interface
- Examined the problem of Impact v Activity – explain the impact not describe the activity: there had been a lot of activity but few were sure what really mattered

The Most Able Survey - rationale

Many of these able students fail to reach their full potential. This is most obvious when we consider the pupils who did well in both English and mathematics at primary school and then examine their achievement at GCSE five years later. At the national level:

- Almost two thirds (65%) of high-attaining pupils leaving primary school, securing Level 5 in both English and mathematics, did not reach an A* or A grade in both these GCSE subjects in 2012 in non-selective secondary schools. This represented over 65,000 students.

- Just over a quarter (27%) of these previously high-attaining students attending non-selective secondary schools did not reach a B grade in both English and mathematics at GCSE in 2012. This represented just over 27,000 young people.

- In 20% of the 1,649 non-selective 11 to 18 schools, not one student in 2012 achieved the minimum of two A grades and one B grade in at least two of the facilitating A-level subjects required by many of our most prestigious universities.

The Most Able survey – student perceptions

What students and pupils say:

- Primary – enthusiasm for the subject but rarely stretched
- Secondary – many aim at unremarkable
- Cultural issues and peer pressures – including FSM students
- Keeping it hidden - 'They don't know and we don't say'
- Pupils preferred 'home research' activity – not homework – technology is changing this
- Mathematics – the best researched case study – most 'known but problematic' curriculum area
- The very able with additional needs were often missed

What did the best schools do well?

The visits also identified common characteristics in the schools that were doing well for their most able students:

- leadership that was determined to improve standards for all students
- high expectations among the most able students, their families and teachers
- effective transition arrangements that supported the students' move from primary to secondary school, ensuring that the most able sustained the progress they had made and maintained the pace of their learning
- early identification of the most able students so that teaching was adapted, and the curriculum tailored, to meet their needs
- flexibility in the curriculum, allowing the most able students to be challenged and extended
- groupings that allowed the students to be stretched from the very start of secondary school
- expert teaching, supported by effective formative assessment and purposeful homework, that stimulated students' enjoyment of the subject
- effective training and cooperative practice, ensuring that teachers learnt from one another
- tight checks on the progress of the most able students so that any slippage was identified early and acted on
- an effective programme that encouraged and supported the most able students to apply to our most prestigious universities.

Recommendations can be grouped into specific areas

Universities:

- Schools' successes in getting pupils to top universities should be part of accountability package
- Schools should better promote knowledge of top universities
- Schools should ensure staff know how to support pupils' access to these
- Provide opportunities for young people to develop university-type skills

Bridging the primary/secondary divide:

- Better 'progress measures' to track from age 10 to 16
- Closer co-operation and planning between schools at the 'transfer' point age 11
- More challenging curriculum 11-14
- Closer analysis of mixed ability classes age 11-14 in particular

Recommendations:

School ethos:
- Greater support and valuing of more able pupils
- Greater expectations in specific areas like homework

Parents:
- Schools need to provide better information to parents about whether their child is reaching his/her potential
- Parents of 'first generation' university potential children need more specific support

The best teaching?

The pattern of poor achievement for the more able is now clear:

Teachers' subject knowledge is weak

Assessment systems do not identify pupils' potential or their prior learning

The core reason is that PLANNING is not good enough

Tasks are too easy

Tasks are same for all

Low expectations of what will be done

Too little challenge in lessons

Compounded by – lack of checking on progress in lessons, poor guidance in marking

Compounded by – lack of chance to develop writing and speaking

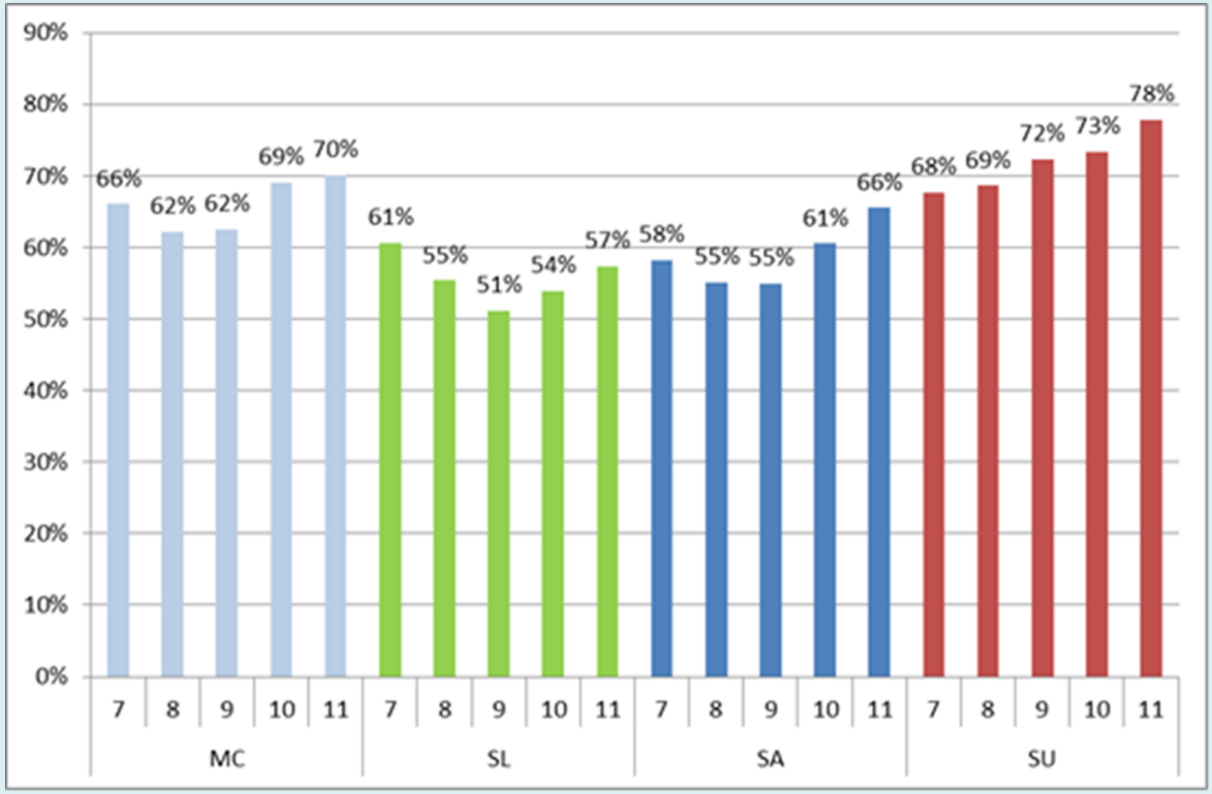
Compounded by – poor time management

Compounded by – lack of application ACROSS subjects

Why subject knowledge?

We know that in primary schools MATHS is the area where 'more able' issues surface most often – teachers lack the knowledge to stretch them, but in secondaries this problem is often masked by what happens in 'setting':

Proportion of good or better teaching, by type of class



Outstanding teaching is always the key….

A culture of high performance:

- connect with every pupil in the room; they have faith in every one and show real ambition for all
- instil self-belief in their pupils, but also build up high levels of reciprocal trust between pupils
- celebrate success and build in pupils the personal attributes they need to face the challenges of learning.

Pursuit of scholastic excellence:

- high expectations and a passion for their subject
- high level of confidence in their own specialist knowledge and ability to impart this to pupils
- modelled complex ideas, giving explanations and demonstrations that heightened pupils' understanding
- attention to the development of pupils' technical proficiency in and across each subject

Precision pedagogy:

- capacity to match the teaching to the differing needs, interest and learning styles of the pupils in class
- combined their knowledge of the subject matter and how children learn to skilfully plan teaching sequences within and across lessons
- worked with all abilities and were similarly adept at varying the type of engagement they had; listening, re-iterating, questioning and observing

Inspection and the most able

Schools, inspectors and governors have easy access to data:

Schools can assess their own performance using the same package of data as inspectors

- Some information about the background of pupils
- Attainment in maths, reading and writing at age 7
- Attainment and progress in English (reading and writing) and maths at 11
- Attainment and progress across a range of subjects at 16
- Various packages assessing attainment and progress at 18
- Other national data, eg access to the leading universities

In effective schools, all managers but also governors use the data to ask challenging questions. Often a nominated governor focuses on the more able.

Schools and inspectors can examine progress closely:

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Table 5.3.2: Expected Progress in mathematics Key Stage 2 to Key Stage 4 - sublevel variation

This table shows the number of pupils attaining each mathematics Key Stage 4 grade and their corresponding mathematics Key Stage 2 prior attainment, including sub-levels.

Number of Pupils		Key Stage 4 Mathematics grade																	
		sub level	no KS4 result	U	G	F	E	D	C	B	A	A*	Total No. of Pupils	Number Achieving Expected Progress	School % Achieving Expected Progress	National % Achieving Expected Progress	Number Achieving More Than Expected Progress	School % Achieving More Than Expected Progress	National % Achieving More Than Expected Progress
KS2 Mathematics attainment	Other or no prior available		1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0%	57%	0	0%	32%
	W		0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0%	11%	0	0%	6%
	1		1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0%	17%	0	0%	7%
	2		0	1	1	2	0	1	0	0	0	0	5	1	20%	21%	1	20%	9%
	3	3C	0	1	3	2	2	1	1	0	0	0	10	2	20%	24%	1	10%	10%
		3B	1	0	0	3	3	2	2	0	0	0	11	4	36%	41%	2	18%	20%
		3A	0	0	4	6	3	3	5	0	0	0	21	8	38%	59%	5	24%	34%
	4	4C	0	0	2	4	2	7	11	0	1	0	27	12	44%	55%	1	4%	9%
		4B	0	0	0	3	4	2	21	5	0	0	35	26	74%	75%	5	14%	19%
		4A	0	0	0	0	2	1	20	5	2	0	30	27	90%	89%	7	23%	39%
	5	5C	0	0	0	0	0	2	13	7	4	1	27	12	44%	66%	5	19%	30%
		5B	0	0	0	0	0	0	6	3	6	0	15	9	60%	86%	6	40%	57%
		5A	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	1	3	3	9	7	78%	96%	6	67%	83%
												Summary	192	108	56%	68%	39	20%	31%

Total Cohort	192

Key

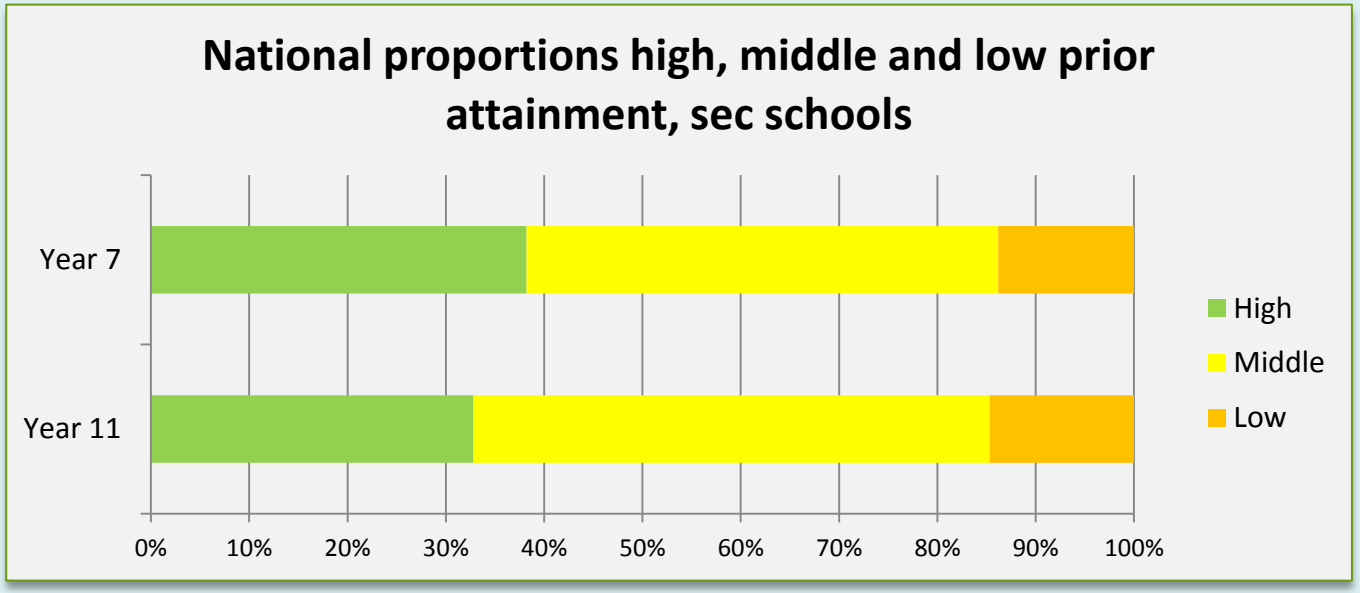
- represents pupils making more than expected progress
- represents pupils making expected progress
- represents pupils making less than expected progress
- indicates pupils whose progress could not be determined and who have therefore been excluded from the school calculation. These pupils are included in the figure for the total cohort

The progress of different groups can be easily compared:

	School Score	Boys	Girls	FSM*	Non FSM*	CLA	Not CLA	CLA or FSM*	Not CLA or FSM*	Low	Middle	High	Onroll throughout Yrs 10&11	First Language - English	First Language - Other	First Language - Unclassified	Non-SEN	SEN: Without Statement	SEN: School Action	SEN: School Action Plus	SEN: Statement
Cohort for VA	191	99	92	54	137	2	189	55	136	44	100	47	185	189	2	0	120	69	58	11	2
School Score	1021.5	1014.8	1030.9	999.3	1031.7	1035.4	1022.4	999.9	1031.7	1032.9	1026.1	1005.3	1023.5	1021.9	1084.5	-	1028.6	1016.6	1024.5	975.0	864.7
95% confidence interval	9.1	13.6	14.1	18.5	11.6	95.9	9.9	18.3	11.6	20.4	13.6	19.8	10.0	9.9	95.9	-	12.4	16.3	17.8	40.9	95.9
Group national mean	1000.0	990.6	1008.9	981.9	1005.4	951.6	999.9	981.6	1005.5	998.4	999.2	1000.8	1001.1	996.3	1028.7	1002.9	1005.6	977.2	991.2	950.3	974.5
Significance from national average for group	Sig+	Sig+	Sig+		Sig+		Sig+		Sig+	Sig+	Sig+		Sig+	Sig+		-	Sig+	Sig+	Sig+		Sig-
Significance from overall national average	Sig+	Sig+	Sig+		Sig+		Sig+		Sig+	Sig+	Sig+		Sig+	Sig+		-	Sig+	Sig+	Sig+		Sig-

This school does very well with most groups, but not *quite* as well with its more able. We should ask WHY this is. It could be teachers' subject knowledge, the style of teaching, lack of appropriate expectations, setting policy etc.

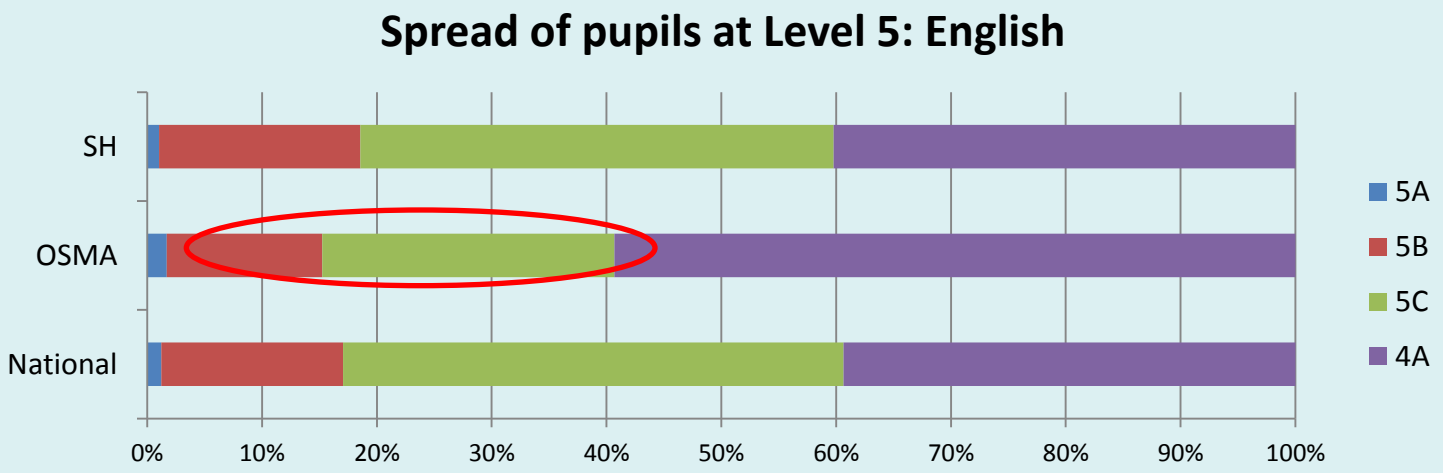
Do we agree how to define 'more able'? The proportion seems to vary and extends well down into the 'middling':

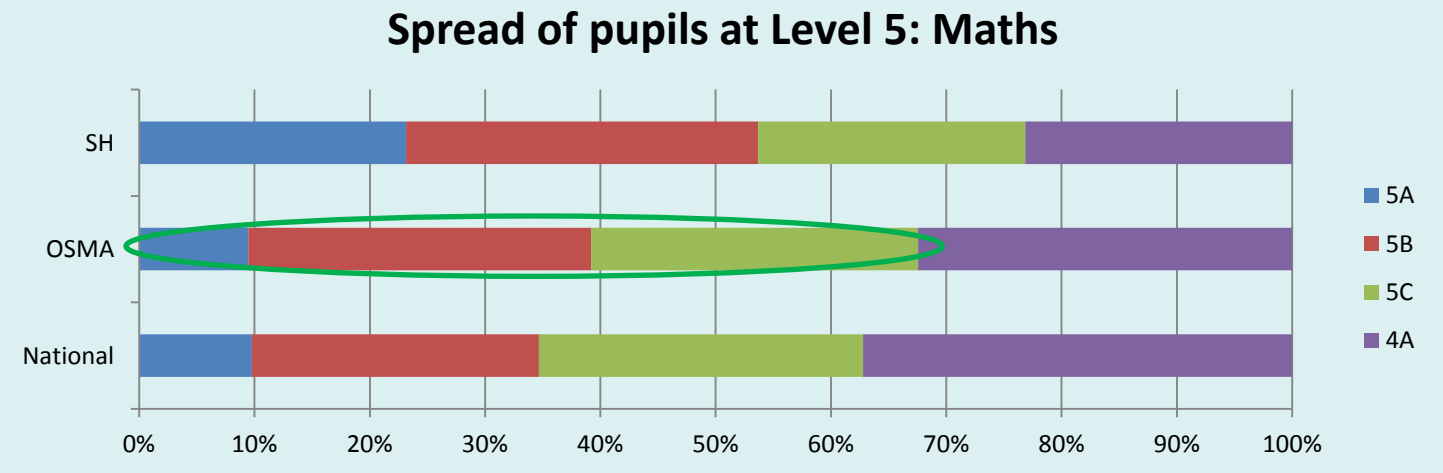


PISA talks about the top 5-10%, but our 'more able' might be between 33% and 38% of the national population. This broad spread can have an impact on school evaluation- as we shall see.

We define it as '30 points or more in KS2' – it is a broad band.

For some schools, many of their 'more able' are in reality just 'above average' – these two schools have a very mixed picture by subject:



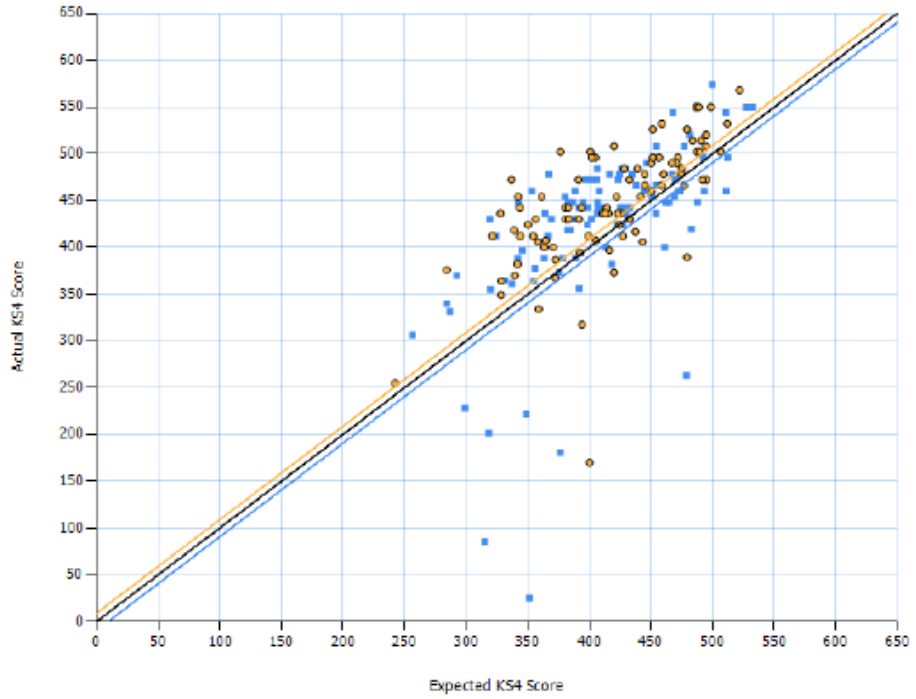


Scatter graphs provide visual clues about patterns:

Chart 5.4.6: Key Stage 2 to Key Stage 4 value added analysis by pupil (Gender)

2012 Best 8 including English and mathematics subject area value added line, showing spread of pupils by gender

The analysis is based upon comparing the estimated outcome with the actual outcome of each pupil. Also shown are the national mean lines for each characteristic.



Guidance to inspectors is specific:

In lessons, inspectors are asked to:

- gather evidence about how well individual pupils and particular groups of pupils are learning and making progress, including those with special needs, those for whom the pupil premium provides support and the most able, and assess the extent to which pupils have grown in knowledge

- teaching engages and includes all pupils, with work that is challenging enough and that meets their individual needs, including for the most able pupils

Inspectors must ensure they identify and talk with more able pupils:

51. Inspectors must gather evidence from a wide range of pupils, including disabled pupils, those with special educational needs, those for whom the pupil premium provides support, pupils who are receiving other forms of support and the most able.

Making a judgement:

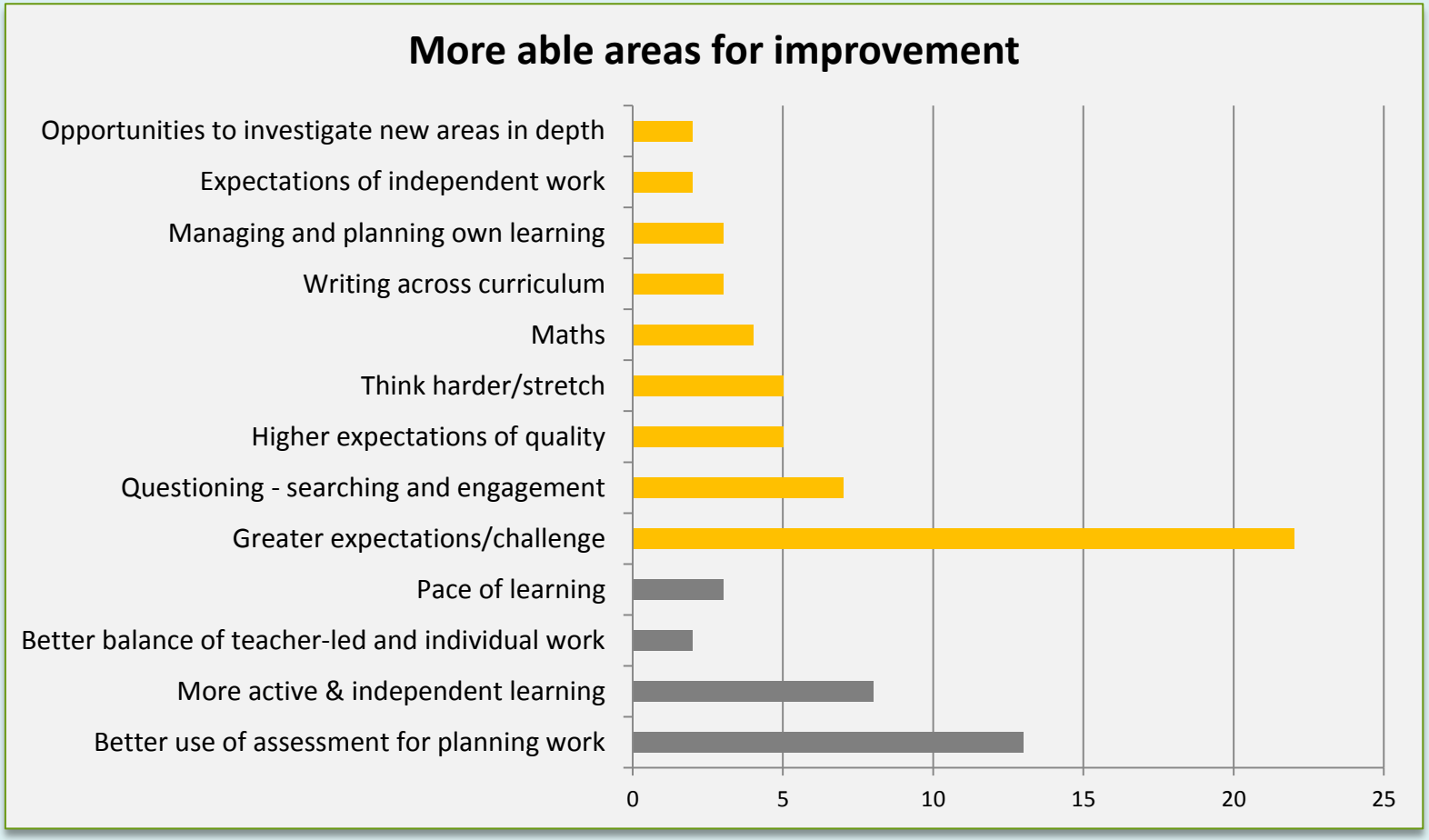
The progress of more able pupils MUST inform the judgement on Achievement:

115. When judging achievement, inspectors must have regard for pupils' starting points in terms of their prior attainment and age. This includes the progress that the lowest attaining pupils are making and its effect on raising their attainment, and the progress that the most able are making towards attaining the highest levels and grades.

The grade descriptor for 'inadequate Achievement' makes specific reference to more able pupils:

- Groups of pupils, particularly disabled pupils and/or those who have special educational needs and/or those for whom the pupil premium provides support, and/or the most able, are underachieving.

Inspectors' recommendations for the more able are either about planning/assessment or challenge/expectations: rarely about leadership and management of teaching or teacher knowledge



Some inspectors are more successful than others at handling the issue of how to plan for greater challenge:

Some inspectors have got into the habit of seeing 'working independently' as a key part of raising the performance of the more able, but some explain it much better or more clearly than others:

- Give able pupils more opportunities to investigate areas in depth and explore more complex issues
- Providing more opportunities for students to work things out by themselves, and fully explain their thinking or solutions and so develop their independent learning skills
- Teachers plan well for the most part to meet the needs of the wide range of pupils in their classes. Occasionally, the more-able pupils in particular, are asked to sit for too long through introductions to ideas they already understand before getting on with independent work which they may have too little time to complete. This limits their progress
- Set demanding tasks earlier in the lesson rather than as extension

Recommendations are more effective where they are precise and detailed: how good are these?

- Improve the quality of teaching so that more is outstanding by making sure that:
  - teachers take more opportunities to stretch the more able students by consistently providing more challenging tasks and by making them think harder about their learning
  - the best practice in using assessment information to plan better learning is firmly established throughout the school
  - questioning is always searching and there are frequent opportunities for students to improve their understanding through discussion about what they learn in lessons
  - teachers talk less and give students more opportunities to take responsibility, including learning by themselves.
- Improve the provision and outcomes in science by ensuring that:
  - the new staffing structure is fully embedded
  - teaching challenges younger, more able students to improve their knowledge, understanding and skills in order to prepare them better for enhanced performance.

- Raise the standards of more-able pupils by:
  - planning lessons more closely matched to these pupils' levels so they build on what pupils already know at a sufficient pace
  - regularly including opportunities that give these pupils enough scope to challenge and make them think for themselves
  - recognising when these pupils understand, and immediately moving them to more difficult work.

Strengthening the inspection guidance has led to more schools being challenged on improving learning for the more able: