



## Understanding Schools through Data

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There are huge amounts of publicly available data about schools, especially in England. Key sources include the 'Get Information About Schools' service provided by the Department for Education (<https://get-information-schools.service.gov.uk>), inspection reports from Ofsted (<https://reports.ofsted.gov.uk>) and the website of the Independent Schools Council (<https://www.isc.co.uk/schools/>).

These reveal a wide range of educational trends, some surprising and others less so. For example, pupils in more affluent areas tend to get better exam results than those in poorer areas – but this is less true in primary schools and in London. On average, girls tend to do slightly better at reading and writing while boys do better in maths – but these effects can vary greatly by age and topic. Pupils at private schools tend to get higher marks than those at state schools – but most of this difference arises from the pupils rather than the schools, and it varies by subject. Last but not least, life satisfaction tends to decline as children get older, especially among girls – and happiness seems to be driven by very different factors among younger children compared to older ones, and for girls versus boys.

For parents and carers assessing potential school choices using such data, we suggest bearing the following things in minds:

- There are good and bad schools of every kind and in all parts of the country. (Comparisons by location or school type usually hide even greater variation within each group.)
- While lots of information is available, context is key to making sense of it. (For example, exam league tables are determined more by pupils and their families than teachers and schools.)
- Think about what's really important to you rather than what everyone else is talking about. (We usually pay attention to things that are easy to analyse, such as exam results, rather than things we ought to care about, such as wellbeing.)