



Department
for Education

Understanding schools' responses to the Progress 8 accountability measure

Research report

July 2017

CooperGibson Research

Contents

List of tables	4
1. Executive Summary	5
1.1 The research	5
1.2 Summary of findings	5
1.2.1 Areas for clarification	6
1.2.2 School responses to Progress 8	7
1.2.3 Challenges and barriers	7
2. Introduction	8
2.1 Methodology	8
2.1.1 Sampling approach	8
3. Understanding and perceptions	12
3.1 Calculating Progress 8 scores	13
3.2 Headline issues	14
3.2.1 The impact of outliers	15
3.2.2 Lack of contextualisation in the calculations	15
3.2.3 Narrowing of the curriculum	16
3.2.4 First versus best entry	17
3.2.5 Subject-specific issues	18
4. School responses	20
4.1 Ongoing assessment of qualification/curriculum offer	20
4.2 Decision making – subject choices	21
4.3 Pupil performance monitoring	22
4.4 Culture change/training staff	24
4.5 Adapted approach to interventions	24
4.6 Raising aspirations among learners	25
4.7 Teaching allocations changed	25
5. Barriers and challenges	27
5.1 Timing of the change	27
5.2 Lack of resources	28

5.3 Complexity of calculations	29
5.4 Need for more guidance	31
5.5 Challenges to overcoming obstacles/barriers	31
6. Concluding Comments	33

List of tables

Table 1 Interviewees by job role	10
Table 2 Sample of interviewees by region	10
Table 3 How you would rate your understanding of Progress 8?	12

1. Executive Summary

In November 2016, CooperGibson Research was commissioned by the Department for Education to carry out in-depth qualitative research with a sample of schools to explore their understanding of the new Progress 8 measure, strategies that they have introduced to implement it, and the barriers/obstacles that they may have encountered.

1.1 The research

Telephone interviews were undertaken with 38 individuals across 21 schools. Twenty-five participants were senior school leaders (Headteachers, Deputy Headteachers/Vice Principals), and thirteen were middle leaders (Heads of Department, Data Managers).

These participants represented a range of Academies and Local Authority Maintained schools, with seventeen mixed, three girls' schools, and one boys' school.

Geographically, participants were spread fairly broadly: eleven in the South East, eight in the North West and seven in the West Midlands, with smaller numbers in other regions.

1.2 Summary of findings

The findings in this report present the perceptions and views of interviewees about the new Progress 8 accountability measure and how it has been implemented.

Overall respondents were positive about Progress 8. They thought that it was achieving the aim to focus on progress rather than attainment and had encouraged schools to consider progress across whole school cohorts.

The large majority of interviewees (34 of 38) regarded their understanding of the Progress 8 measure to be 'good' or 'excellent'. The remaining four rated it as 'average'. However, some inaccuracies or misconceptions in participants' understanding of the technical details of Progress 8 calculations were identified during the interviews (and have been footnoted where appropriate in this report), suggesting that further guidance and support is required.¹ There appeared to be a little less overall knowledge among all participant types in terms of the details of the calculations that are used to establish a Progress 8 score. For example, interviewees tended not to have considered the confidence intervals too much due to their complexity.

¹ For current guidance on Progress 8, refer to <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/progress-8-school-performance-measure>

1.2.1 Areas for clarification

There were five key points commonly raised by interview participants during the discussions. These created tension for many interviewees between the choices that needed to be made for the interests of an individual child against those for the school's Progress 8 score.

- 1. Impact of outliers:** Learners who may have been absent due to illness, bereavement, or referral to alternative provision and do not achieve as expected at GCSE compared to those with similar starting points at the end of primary school, are perceived by schools to have a disproportionately negative effect on the Progress 8 score. This was a concern for all schools, but particularly those with small cohorts and with negative Progress 8 scores.
- 2. Lack of contextualisation:** Relating to the above (outliers), interviewees felt that the current Progress 8 calculation does not allow for contextualisation/variation in cohorts (e.g. Special Educational Needs, English as an Additional Language, small schools, areas of deprivation). It was felt that these additional factors needed to be more clearly recognised in the calculation.
- 3. Narrowing of the curriculum:** Schools felt that the need to fill Progress 8 buckets meant that a narrowing of the curriculum was occurring. This was due to some subjects being discontinued or reduced (arts, design technology, ICT, PE and religious studies were all mentioned in relation to this). There were also concerns about the perceived limited space for vocational qualifications in the buckets, and this was felt to disadvantage learners.
- 4. First versus best entry:** Interviewees in schools with negative Progress 8 scores felt that the measure should recognise the best rather than the first assessment entry.² This was perceived to currently affect the potential Progress 8 scores of a) those learners who would achieve higher grades in a resit, and b) gifted and talented learners who may have previously entered a GCSE early to progress to AS (schools are stopping this to maximise their 'first' entry score).
- 5. Subject-specific queries** were raised in relation to English literature/language and science. Interviewees queried whether it was necessary for students to take both English language and literature in order to create a double weighting (some schools enter learners for the latter without them actually being taught the subject). There was some confusion about how many slots science takes up in the

² This change to count first entry in performance tables came in to effect in 2013, and Progress 8 has continued that established pattern.

Progress 8 buckets; others perceived that dual science was going to have a negative impact on their progress score due to its inappropriateness for some learners.

1.2.2 School responses to Progress 8

Schools reported implementing a range of strategies in response to Progress 8. Most commonly these were:

- Ongoing assessment of their qualifications/curriculum offer
- Strategic subject choices
- Pupil performance monitoring
- Culture change/staff training
- Adaptation of interventions
- Raising aspirations
- Changing teaching allocations

1.2.3 Challenges and barriers

The main challenges that schools reported in preparing for and implementing Progress 8 were reported to be a lack of resources (e.g. staff shortages, financial constraints) and the number of curriculum/policy changes occurring at the same time. Ways that schools are attempting to overcome these include knowledge sharing and retraining/reallocating teaching staff. Requests were made for additional guidance from Government in relation to approved subjects/qualifications, communicating progress to parents/governors and defining 'pass and good' scores in the new 1 to 9 grading system (to help with school setting targets for their learners).

2. Introduction

In October 2013, the Department for Education (DfE) announced that a new secondary school accountability system would be implemented from 2016. As one of six headline measures, Progress 8 aims to capture the progress pupils in a school make from the end of primary school to the end of secondary school. It is a type of value added measure, which means that pupils' results are compared to the actual achievements of other pupils across England with the same prior attainment.³

In order to support DfE's awareness of whether the policy is working as intended, CooperGibson Research were commissioned by DfE to carry out a research project with schools to explore their understanding of the new measure, strategies introduced to implement it, and the barriers/obstacles that they may have encountered.

2.1 Methodology

The research involved qualitative, semi-structured telephone interviews with senior and middle leaders in secondary schools and Academies. These interviews investigated:

- The interpretation and understanding of the Progress 8 measure, including a school's understanding of the measure's aims and how it is calculated
- The strategies and behaviours put in place by schools in response to the new Progress 8 measure, and what they may do going forward
- Any obstacles to implementing change, including teacher supply issues or resistance from any stakeholders
- Best practice or innovative approaches to implementing change

2.1.1 Sampling approach

While it is not possible to create a robust, representative sample of the entire country with twenty one schools, the schools in this qualitative research were selected to ensure a broad range of different contexts and pupil attainment. Whilst the sample was varied, it was small and therefore, results should be interpreted with caution.

³ Documents providing information to schools on the new Progress 8 performance measure can be found at the following link: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/progress-8-school-performance-measure>

A sample of 114 schools were invited to participate in the research. Schools were selected by a number of criteria of particular interest, including: schools with large differences between provisional Progress 8 scores and performance under the old headline measure (5+ A*-C including English and maths GCSEs); large differences between provisional Attainment 8 and Progress 8; and large differences between provisional 2016 Progress 8 scores and 2015 value added. Additionally, a number of schools with mid-ranking attainment data were also included to provide a fuller picture. The schools selected have a range of Ofsted judgements.

This sample was constructed to be broadly representative according to the contextual data collected by the Department for Education, including: region, type of school, level of disadvantage (as measured by the proportion of pupils eligible for the pupil premium), religious character of school and school gender (girls only/ boys only /mixed schools).

Of the 114 schools contacted, qualitative fieldwork was undertaken with 21 schools, totalling 38 interviews with senior and middle leaders (see Table 1).

The final selection of 21 schools that agreed to take part included a mix of relatively deprived and relatively advantaged schools from different areas of the country and a broad range of performance data according to both Progress 8 scores and the old 5+ A*-C headline measure. The schools ranged in Progress 8 scores from below to above average and were fairly evenly spread between the two. In terms of school type, seventeen were mixed, with three girls' schools and one boys' school; seventeen were Academies and four were Local Authority Maintained schools.

A total of 38 school staff participated in interviews; 25 were Headteachers/Senior Leaders and 13 were middle leaders (Data Managers/Heads of Department). When contacted, some schools preferred their Deputy Headteachers as well as Headteachers to take part in the interviews, rather than a member of the middle leadership team (Table 1).

Table 1 Interviewees by job role

Heads/Senior Leaders		Middle leaders	
Job role	Total	Job role	Total
Headteachers	12	Data Managers	3
Principals	2	Heads of English	4
Vice Principal	1	Heads of Mathematics	4
Associate Vice Principal	1	Heads of Science	2
Assistant Principal	1	Total	13
Assistant Headteachers	3		
Deputy Headteachers	4		
Head of Upper School	1		
Total	25		

Geographically, schools were spread fairly broadly between the north, south and midlands of England, with smaller numbers in other regions (Table 2).

Table 2 Sample of interviewees by region

Region	Number of interviewees
South East	11
North West	8
West Midlands	7
Greater London	4
Yorkshire and the Humber	2
East Midlands	2
South West	2
North East	1
East of England	1
Total	38

Note on findings

The findings reported are based on the perceptions of individual interviewees about the new Progress 8 measure and how it has been implemented. The report may therefore, contain some existing misconceptions and inaccuracies based on respondents' understanding of the technical details of Progress 8. Examples of which are included in footnotes throughout.⁴ The Schools briefing note published with this report also provides further detail.

⁴ For current guidance on Progress 8, refer to <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/progress-8-school-performance-measure>

3. Understanding and perceptions

When they were asked to rate their understanding of the Progress 8 measure, 34 interviewees said that it was either 'good' or 'excellent'; the remaining four rated it as 'average' (Table 3).

Table 3 How you would rate your understanding of Progress 8?

Rating	Number of interviewees
Excellent	15
Good	19
Average	4
Poor	0
Extremely poor	0

Base: 38 interviewees

This self-assessment proved to be reasonably fair, although some inaccuracies or misconceptions in participants' understanding of the technical details of Progress 8 calculations were identified during the interviews (and have been footnoted where appropriate in this report). When asked to explain their general understanding of Progress 8 in terms of its aims and overall measures, however, the large majority of interview participants were able to communicate to interviewers the specificities in terms of the score itself, buckets and floor standard. Similarly, most voiced their awareness of the increased academic focus resulting from Progress 8, with some feeling that this was implemented in order to 'push' the 'drive' on the English Baccalaureate (EBacc). A small number were less certain on the number of buckets, and which subjects were approved – for example, there was some confusion related to separate science subjects, and which of the creative arts were approved (see section 3.1.4 for subject-specific issues).

Overall respondents were positive that Progress 8 was achieving the aim of encouraging schools to deepen their focus on all pupil progress, rather than on attainment. For example it was felt that Progress 8 had reduced school focus on supporting pupils on the borderline between C and D grades and instead they were beginning to better support the progress of all: 'It has been a positive move as every single grade of progression counts' (Assistant Headteacher, East of England). Where it was received most positively, Progress 8 was perceived as a means to 'stop schools coasting' and recognise the importance of focusing on the abilities of all learners across a school (Headteacher, North West).

However, schools did not generally agree that Progress 8 was achieving the aim of a broad curriculum. Some suggested they already had a broad curriculum, however, they

felt that a focus on English and maths and EBacc subjects was limiting the curriculum offer or that Progress 8 would not encourage a broad curriculum generally (this is discussed in section 3.2.3).

In terms of the type of staff interviewed, there was little difference in the overall level of *awareness* of Progress 8 and its aims. However, in general middle leaders (e.g. Heads of Department) reported less confidence in terms of *understanding* the details such as combinations of subjects allowed and broader issues such as the floor standard. For example, a Head of Maths in the North West said 'I am not sure which subjects are excluded, and which subjects are selected for the third bucket...it is quite complex'.

Data Managers were highly informed and could speak about Progress 8 to the same level of detail as the Headteachers who were interviewed. This reflects the role that they undertake, managing pupil data and working in an advisory capacity to Senior Leadership Teams (SLTs). Indeed, one reported finding it difficult to communicate some of the Progress 8 changes to members of their SLT.

'My assistant and I do the calculations as the SLT want to know what we are going to get this year, but with the technical spec changes we can't tell them yet. They don't seem to [understand] however many times we tell them.' (Data Manager, South East)

3.1 Calculating Progress 8 scores

There appeared to be a little less overall knowledge among all participant types (apart from Data Managers) in terms of the detail of the calculations that are used to establish a Progress 8 score. For example, interviewees tended not to have considered the confidence intervals too much due to their complexity (this included Data Managers).

'I don't know enough about how [confidence intervals] are used for Progress 8 even though I am a maths teacher. I haven't looked at or thought about it – just looked at the headline Progress 8 score.'
(Headteacher, East Midlands)

Instead, participants focused more in their responses on the Progress 8 score and the double weighting of subjects. For the latter, most were satisfied with the double weighting of English and Maths – 'they are vital' – although there were broader queries about how the calculation for English in particular is established (see section 3.2.4).

In terms of developing a baseline, using Key Stage 2 (KS2) assessment data to establish Key Stage 4 targets was a cause of some concern for schools during the discussions, as some had 'a question mark over KS2 scores and how accurate they are'. This was due to the nature of the KS2 assessment process, and also whether targets for subjects such as

history and geography can be accurate because ‘part of that data is through teacher assessment and not through external examination’ (Head of English, East Midlands).⁵ The changes to the assessment system at KS2 was also a factor creating uncertainty for some schools, ‘as we don’t know how the old-fashioned levels are matching up to the new scores’ (Headteacher, East Midlands). But overall schools understood that a national benchmark was required. An Assistant Principal in the North West commented: ‘There is nothing better to use than KS2 and it is the same for everyone, so fair enough’.

Overall, interviewees appeared to feel that the Progress 8 measure was an improvement as it focuses on all pupil progress and has encouraged them to monitor progress across whole school cohorts.

‘It makes you focus in your teaching strategy on good [early] interventions, making sure that we are addressing the needs of the students in the classroom. The staff have to look at every single student.’ (Headteacher, South East)

There were, however, some caveats in the responses received, which are detailed below.

3.2 Headline issues

Participants had some specific concerns that they felt needed addressing to achieve a more accurate and reflective Progress 8 score:

- Impact of outliers on the overall school score
- Lack of contextualisation in the calculations
- Narrowing of the curriculum to focus on Progress 8 score
- First versus best entry
- Subject-specific queries.

These issues (discussed below) created tension for many interviewees between the choices that needed to be made for the interests of an individual child, and in the interests of a school’s Progress 8 score.

‘Where students are really struggling we try to encourage them to complete their courses but if they do have to drop a subject then we try to ensure that they don’t end up with any empty buckets. It’s difficult because there’s tension

⁵ The Progress 8 baseline uses Key Stage 2 test scores. Teacher assessment is used only when test results are not available.

between what's best for the student and best for the school. But to be a good school you need to be high up in the league tables so you still have...to get your place on the table at the expense of what's best for students.... for non-academic students it's making them suffer.' (Deputy Headteacher, South West)

3.2.1 The impact of outliers

Concerns were commonly raised about the 'huge effect' that outliers were perceived to potentially have on a school's Progress 8 score. One Headteacher in the North West reported that outliers had 'changed our scores from -0.35 to -0.48'.

'The definition of an outlier might be different from one school to the next. There needs to be some clarity about these, and I do feel that for a nominal amount of students in this bracket, could the number of qualifications they need to take be made smaller?' (Head of Maths, South East)

In terms of providing a definition, outliers were considered by participants to include children who were:

- Being schooled in alternative provision but were still registered at the school as their main site
- Dealing with social and emotional issues that were 'out of our influence and is not about the quality of teaching'
- Experiencing health issues (including mental health), or
- Taking prolonged absence for unforeseen reasons such as bereavement.

Although the impact of outliers was reported by all school types, the impact was perceived to be an even greater concern for smaller schools and those with negative Progress 8 scores, despite confidence intervals.

- The Progress 8 figure doesn't reflect a fair picture of the school, especially if you have two EAL and two SEN pupils in the class. Size of schools has a big impact on the Progress 8 score – more of an impact than 5A*-C. (Data Manager, Greater London)

3.2.2 Lack of contextualisation in the calculations

In connection to the issue of outliers, it was commonly perceived by interview participants that the Progress 8 calculations did not allow for any contextual consideration/cohort variation (e.g. special needs, EAL, boys' schools, sudden hospitalisation/serious illness, small schools). Concern was therefore raised about students taking more subjects than they previously would have done to ensure that buckets are full.

'It's kids with SEN who suffer – it is about getting them a better score based on what they can attain. We give them intervention but they can't fill every bucket.' (Data Manager, Greater London)

It was therefore felt by interviewees that these issues needed to be more clearly recognised in the Progress 8 scores.

'We have students that the LA would congratulate us for as we have kept them in school and they have left with some qualifications, but for them we have a negative Progress 8 score. This doesn't take into account context where the old measures did. Unless [Government] take away the bottom 10% students or do something that can take into account context, it won't be fair. All schools have students facing mental health challenges or with medical issues – some schools in certain areas will face more of it.' (Deputy Headteacher, West Midlands)⁶

'There are some schools in challenging circumstances for whom securing a positive Progress 8 is always going to be challenging and in some cases impossible. Some schools who on the face of it look not to be doing well are doing remarkable work.' (Headteacher, South East)

3.2.3 Narrowing of the curriculum

Several were concerned by their school's discontinuation of subjects in the arts, design technologies, and ICT as a result of efforts to fill Progress 8 buckets with EBacc subjects (for detail on the ways in which schools have changed their curriculum offer in direct response to Progress 8, see section 4.1). Whilst these subjects (as approved qualifications) can count in the open bucket for Progress 8, respondents suggested that their schools seemed to focus on filling EBacc slots which in turn, meant that resources were limited for other subjects. Thus, it was perceived that this restriction limited the prospects and future choices of young people who wish to pursue creative subjects within their careers. Balancing the 'demands of Progress 8 with the ethos and focus of the school' was felt to be creating a narrower curriculum – for schools with both negative and positive Progress 8 scores.

'Consequences of EBacc criteria means that students have their choices restricted because we want to fit in the model and fit all the criteria. A

⁶ The DfE previously published a contextual value-added (CVA) measure, which attempted to quantify how well a school does with its pupil population compared to pupils with similar characteristics nationally. However, the 2010 White Paper announced that this measure would be discontinued (see item 6.12) <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-importance-of-teaching-the-schools-white-paper-2010>.

restrictive choking effect on curriculum choices, steering towards more academic and traditional EBacc choices.' (Deputy Headteacher, South West)

'It has restricted our offer to some extent. For example, we can't offer vocational options for those struggling.' (Data Manager, Greater London)

There were calls as a result to increase the number of vocational or 'open' subjects that learners can choose across their Progress 8 buckets ('the students have less choice now') thereby enabling 'more flexibility' for schools to cater for the needs (and interests) of all learners, particularly where a strong academic focus 'is not an appropriate' pathway.

'There needs to be more thought about how vocational qualifications could be "celebrated" in bucket 4, to better meet the needs of our pupils and school context.' (Vice-Principal, West Midlands)

'We had an option system where students chose four options they are interested in that inspire them – over the last 10-12 years we have managed to fit that curriculum in with 98% accuracy – students love it, parents do and staff love it. We feel it has served young people of this school for the past decade and a half. Now I can't believe we are having serious conversations to change it because of Progress 8. Now we are having to change because of pressures of Progress 8. In terms of narrowing the curriculum, we will have to reinforce maths, English (to be fair this is not just as a result of Progress 8, it is also because of increased quantity in GCSE specs). Other schools have done it [narrowed curriculum to EBacc subjects] and if we don't we will be left behind, they have reinforced or overfilled their EBacc basket – so students get three from four or five choices knowing the last two can drop into the open basket. There are many subjects we could lose - music, art PE, business studies, drama, technology, but we don't want to chuck out all that history of excellent practice.' (Headteacher and Deputy Headteacher, North West)

3.2.4 First versus best entry

There were concerns raised by interviewees, in schools with negative Progress 8 scores, that the measure counted only the first entry made by a learner to a specific assessment.

'The published figure for P8 is lower than [the] real one because it is based on progress to first entry not to the best entry.' (Deputy Head, West Midlands)

This was perceived to be a disadvantage to learners who may achieve an improved result when they resit an exam, but whose progress to 'best' entry would not be recognised in the Progress 8 score. At the other end of the scale, this aspect of the measure was also felt to be a restriction on gifted and talented learners who were no longer entering exams early.⁷

'Up until three years ago we had large number of children who took early entry in Year 11 in maths...We no longer do that to maximise results as it is the first entry that counts.' (Headteacher, South East)

3.2.5 Subject-specific issues

English

Some interviewees queried whether it was necessary for students to take both English Language and Literature in order to create a double weighting. For example an Assistant Headteacher in the East of England referred to the double weighting of subjects as 'strange anomalies'; an Assistant Headteacher in the West Midlands felt the calculation was 'crude'. As a result of the double weighting on English, two schools reported that pupils had been entered for English Literature for the purpose of receiving points towards the Progress 8 score, even if it was not appropriate for the learner: 'even if they get a low score...it is still extra points for free' (Head of Maths, North West). One reported that pupils 'just have to be entered for English Literature, they don't even have to turn up [to the exam] on the day' (Assistant Headteacher, East of England).⁸

Science

There was some level of confusion as to the inclusion of science subjects within the current Progress 8 calculations – e.g. how many slots science could take up, and in which buckets.

Several perceived that the offer of dual science was going to have a negative impact on their progress score due to the lack of appropriateness of this amount of science for some learners.

'Now that dual science has to be introduced this is going to reflect the school in a bad light...The current Year 10 pupils don't have a strong exam background and who haven't had a lot of science previously and there are

⁷ This change to count first entry in performance tables came in to effect in 2013, and Progress 8 has continued that established pattern.

⁸ Pupils have to sit exams in both English literature and English language for the best results to be double weighted.

concerns that this cohort will not perform well in the dual science.' (Vice-Principal, West Midlands)

'The introduction of Science as a dual qualification immediately created a disadvantage [for the school]...in terms of the fact that some pupils would not be able to complete a dual qualification.' (Headteacher, West Midlands)

4. School responses

Schools were asked about the strategies and behaviours that had been put into place to prepare for the implementation of Progress 8. For most, this had meant either assessing their current qualification/curriculum offer, or adapting their performance monitoring systems.

Overall, there was little difference noted in the strategies implemented by schools performing above or below average. Those with a below average score appeared to report more strategies than those above average, in terms of pupil interventions, suggesting that as the measure becomes embedded scores may begin to reflect these strategies. It is not possible to ascertain this with any certainty from the small sample interviewed, however, and most schools – regardless of Progress 8 score – reported enhancing or changing their data tracking strategies, additional support offered to all cohorts and continually assessing the curriculum.

4.1 Ongoing assessment of qualification/curriculum offer

The majority of interviewees reported that schools would ‘constantly review the curriculum’ or ‘continue to adapt our curriculum options’ in response to Progress 8. The changes that have been implemented so far have focused on Modern Foreign Languages (MFL), English literature and language, science and creative and vocational qualifications more generally:

- Encouraging pupils to take a MFL where they previously didn’t
- Extending provision to offer MFL in order to fulfil the EBacc subject requirements, where this was not available before
- Making MFL compulsory for Year 8 onwards
- Changing exam boards for subjects such as English and maths (relating to new specifications or because they thought the questions were clearer)
- Reducing the number and range of qualifications on offer (such as removing their BTEC offer, reducing the number of GCSEs available or removing subjects from the curriculum)
- Introducing additional science so that students all undertake science and additional science as two GCSEs
- Separating English language and English literature into two qualifications rather than a combined offer
- Changing the curriculum offer so that previously non-assessed subjects were replaced by formal qualifications, or amending the offer in line with the list of

approved subjects (for example, drama has been changed in one school to GCSE in performing arts; catering and nutrition is offered instead of food technology).

Where qualifications/subjects have been added to provision (e.g. MFL), this has subsequently caused other subjects to be removed from a school's offer for timetabling and resourcing reasons (see 3.1.3 – 'Narrowing the curriculum').

One interviewee said that they didn't initially make any changes beforehand, but having received the first Progress 8 score (below average) 'we are reducing the number of GCSEs' on offer although they did not yet have the detail as to which subjects this would include (Headteacher, North West).

In terms of future planning, most commonly schools said that curriculum assessment would be ongoing. **Specific future changes** were mentioned in relation to a school's curriculum, and these included:

- Changing the curriculum 'so more students do EBacc subjects'
- Reducing the qualification offer (reducing curriculum choice)
- Considering whether to add new qualifications such as ECDL; and
- Encouraging GCSEs in creative subjects to be completed early 'and then followed up with a more technical qualification'.

'We've looked at different subjects we can deliver to 'fix' the needs of these students who will underachieve in the EBacc bucket, like the ECDL, which we would never normally consider but we have for these students as it can help them fill the EBacc bucket. We are looking at it, it's not the sort of thing we want to do, we would rather do something which allows them to make the choices they want.' (Deputy Headteacher, South West)

4.2 Decision making – subject choices

Although a small number of interviewees said that they had considered offering ECDL, four reported already offering the qualification as an effective way to improve Progress 8 scores.

'With 2-3 hours coaching anyone could pass [the ECDL] – that can boost Progress 8 scores and if other schools are using it why not, it is an industry recognised qualification...we have adopted that this year and only time will tell if that is best practice [instead of a 'traditional' curriculum offer].'
(Assistant Headteacher, East of England)

'The school do use the ECDL but only for pupils who take GCSE ICT that are at risk of not getting their grade [used it for 12 out of 180 cohort last

year]. It is not offered to all.' (Headteacher and Data Manager, joint interview, West Midlands)

Not entering students for qualifications was not an option that was favoured among interviewees, but in some circumstances they reported doing so 'with caution'.

For some, the EBacc bucket was creating difficult choices – forcing learners to take history/geography/MFL when they would perform better and be more inspired by other subjects such as performing arts or design technology. It was felt that there should be more flexibility within the EBacc to recognise other subjects as rigorous/challenging even if not traditionally academic. As a result, there was concern that learners were not inspired – and therefore aspirations would suffer, too.

'They are studying something they do not enjoy and don't thrive at.' (Deputy Headteacher, South West)

One said that they think carefully about students taking subjects that do not 'count' towards the open bucket: 'we would rather they raise their attainment in one of the core subjects' (Assistant Headteacher, South East).

In consideration of future planning, one reported that: 'We haven't gone down the route of not entering pupils for some subjects but it is something we will look at to increase our Progress 8 scores if necessary'. (Headteacher, North West). In addition, in the same school subject options were being brought forward in future:

'We are making [learners] choose earlier in two stages - Year 8 options and Year 9 options – to give them more time on their GCSE subjects.'
(Headteacher, North West)

4.3 Pupil performance monitoring

This included more monitoring of higher ability pupils and using data to track all individual pupil progress rather than lower ability cohorts only. One interviewee said that using Progress 8 for data monitoring meant they 'don't just look at grades, we look at value added – it is one of the positives of Progress 8.'

'There is a lot more emphasis in looking at data from management down to class teachers; they are all expected to understand how many points each pupil is expected to get in their subject.' (Head of Upper School, North West)

For another, this meant analysing performance among different cohorts of learners.

'We look very carefully at the different disadvantaged groups such as SEN, and mid to low and high attainment groups on entry, FSM, male and female cohorts - we look at their attainment within each of the baskets and use that for our tracking. We are looking at the lower ability students and the number of EBaccs they are taking to see if we want to increase their proportion of EBacc qualifications, but it has to be in their best interests to do so. We look at the performance of individual subjects with the Progress 8 and Attainment 8 scores and we work with the departments that are not working well under those measures – that is the senior leadership team working with the middle leaders.' (Assistant Headteacher, South East)

Generally, performance monitoring was reported to be more regular and consistent across the school (e.g. every six weeks) with additional meetings held for staff to discuss progress. As an example an Associate Vice-Principal in Greater London reported that 'for senior leaders, strategies are more consistent and robust; we didn't analyse the data before'.

Interviewees said that in the future, they would monitor pupil progress more so that they could identify where specific interventions for pupils or subjects needed to be put into place.

'This means increased focus on particular groups of students who haven't performed as well – working with them to reach P8 targets.' (Deputy Headteacher, West Midlands)

One Acting Deputy Headteacher in the South East reported that schemes of work were changing in the school so that a '5 year plan' starting in Year 7 was in place, rather than the current three-year pathway. This was being implemented so that all pupils were tracked in terms of their progress towards GCSEs from the start of their secondary education.

One Headteacher said that they would need to place additional focus on learners who may have previously been 'managed moved over to another school'. This was to ensure that Progress 8 was not 'an overriding factor in these young people's lives' in terms of schools accepting/not accepting pupils based on their progress scores.

'The issue now as Progress 8 takes hold is that this approach [of managed moved] is not going to be maintained in schools locally; the conversation now is about what their P8 score is.' (Headteacher, East Midlands)

4.4 Culture change/training staff

Related to the changes in performance monitoring, some schools have also perceived a shift in staff/teaching culture. These have included:

- Encouraging teaching staff to closely monitor all pupil performance/progress and understand the benefits of progress for all
- Cultural change is happening – [understanding] that there is as much value in getting a child from an F to an E as there is in a D to a C. Gradually colleagues are beginning to understand that – maximising outcomes for all children. (Headteacher, South East)
- Increased data analysis and discussion within the SLT in relation to Progress 8
- Changes to schemes of work, focusing on pupil targets (ensuring that schemes of work are continuously tailored rather than planned months in advance and not changed).

Two interviewees said that in light of Progress 8, their schools had provided training for staff in data analysis (it was not clear if this was internal or external training).

4.5 Adapted approach to interventions

Changes to interventions included the creation of small groups for extra support – for higher ability as well as lower ability learners; increased one-to-one support and the provision of additional teaching resources where possible. More interventions are now reported to be focused on different groups of learners than previously, and across all cohorts/ability levels.

'There is less focus on the C/D borderline and more focus on achievement...across the board.' (Assistant Principal, North West)

'We have the same principles in monitoring, intervention, support. We have not systematically changed anything, but have accepted that we have to include the whole cohort in those discussions.' (Headteacher, South East)

These changes to the way that interventions are implemented also meant that schools perceived a need to focus not just on academic performance; a Head of English in the South East said that their school was also attempting to implement additional EAL support and address behavioural problems earlier.

A Head of Department in the North West thought that in the future, their school would need to consider employing additional support staff in delivering interventions; another suggested that they may need to recruit language teachers.

'We are hoping to use Pupil Premium funding for interventions, such as one to one support, for equipment and resources like study guides, and any other resources that are being offered by the publishing companies for teaching.' (Head of Maths, North West)

Interventions were reported across the curriculum generally although some were being focused on English and maths specifically. One school in the North West was removing pupils from lessons such as physical education and religious studies 'to have additional support in English and maths'. Another school, also in the North West, had increased the number of mock exams that learners took in subjects such as English and maths so that they were well practised for assessment periods.

4.6 Raising aspirations among learners

Interviewees reported an increased understanding that raising the aspirations of *all* learners was necessary (i.e. not just those among lower ability cohorts), and could refer to aspirations that were not just related to academic performance.

'[We now] have an SLT for more able children, more about aspiration raising, pastoral care, financial support rather than tracking/monitoring.'
(Headteacher, South East)

Raising aspirations was also connected to the need to educate parents/families about the new Progress 8 measure.

'There is a challenge to how we communicate the raising of aspirations – if a parent is happy with just Cs, Progress 8 is getting us to challenge that complacency.' (Assistant Principal, North West)

4.7 Teaching allocations changed

Interviewees mentioned increasing teaching/timetable time for English and maths – and this was to the detriment of other subjects on the curriculum. Participants commonly reported that their schools had included an additional lesson of maths and English per week onto their timetable. These changes had been made specifically in response to Progress 8 double weightings.

Simultaneously, however, teaching time for open subjects had been reduced – or subjects had been removed from the curriculum altogether (see section 4.1). This was reported in subjects including art, PE, ICT, music, drama and technology.

'[We] have dropped ICT at least not as a timetable subject. That is because we have extra lessons for maths and English.' (Head of Maths, North West)

There will be less allocation of teaching time to the open subjects like art and PE - as they don't count double.' (Principal, North West)

Some schools mentioned that this would continue into the future.

'I still think to work properly the English department should grow, by that I mean more curriculum hours, and possibly a different structure - a literature and language department and different timetabling for that.' (Head of English, South East)

5. Barriers and challenges

The main challenges that schools reported in preparing for and implementing Progress 8 were reported to be a lack of resources (e.g. staff shortages, financial constraints) and the number of curriculum/policy changes occurring at the same time. The challenges they reported are summarised below – and where schools have implemented strategies to overcome them, these have been highlighted within each section.

5.1 Timing of the change

The introduction of Progress 8 alongside other measures - such as new GCSE specifications and changes to the grading system - was felt by interviewees to have created confusion in terms of enabling schools to accurately plan and analyse pupil data in preparation for Progress 8. The consequences of the new points system was thought to be a particular issue in determining pupils' targets.

'The phased change of points are a problem. We have an analyst trying to work out the points system to use for year groups but you don't know what value to assign when there is mixed currency next year, then it changes again the following year... The added problem is that we have changed the grading at GCSE and that creates its own uncertainty as we have not yet had a cohort go through with the new grades.' (Assistant Headteacher, East of England)⁹

It was therefore reported by some that the 'main challenge' in implementing Progress 8 was related to implementing new GCSEs, it 'is about understanding the standard; what does a piece of work at grade 4 to 5 look like and we need to equip staff with those skills so they can make accurate forecasts' (Head of English, East Midlands).

Schools were also perceived to require time to adjust to the change to Progress 8 before accurate performance data can be collated and assessed. For example, where schools are making changes to their curriculum, current Year 10 and Year 11 learners may be undertaking qualifications that will not be counted towards Progress 8, but it is too late for them to change their options.

⁹ As the reformed GCSEs come in across 2017 and 2018, the point scores for grades in unreformed GCSEs change.

Preparing for Progress 8 early

One school in the North West mitigated the impact of this lag time to some extent by beginning to prepare for Progress 8 when the initial announcements and consultations took place.

'We moved away from traditional IT courses three years ago (e.g. Excel and Word), recruited three computing teachers – and we teach programming, web design etc. Because of that, at the same time Progress 8 info came out and that counted in the bucket. We struck gold with that. Everything else was just looking at changing courses. We still teach the subject but changed the course to what could be included in Progress 8. You need to be ahead of the game, need to be looking what is out there, what DfE is planning, and be on guard. If it has detrimental effect on student outcomes and life chances then it is a moral question of do we or don't we.'

(Headteacher, North West)

5.2 Lack of resources

Concerns were raised during the interviews about a lack of adequate resources available to schools to implement the measure and boost progress in specific subject areas. These were specifically related to the supply of teaching recruits in shortage subjects. This was perceived to be disabling schools from driving attainment in these areas (physics, maths, English, history, geography and MFL were all mentioned in reference to this).

'[Progress 8] has had an impact on the amount of quality and core subjects we want to deliver as we are finding it difficult with the financial restraints to recruit the right calibre of teachers.' (Assistant Headteacher, South East)

Overcoming funding constraints

A school in the South East has funded the retraining of existing staff and developed 'peer tutoring' systems that involve older learners.

'We are moving to some teachers being retrained and some teachers teaching in their second specialism so that we have more capacity in certain subjects. Funding for the training can be an issue...there are some attractive bursaries for those who want to enter the profession but we wish it was available in a wider range of subjects. A big win for us has been our peer tutoring; we have been using a lot of sixth form students who are doing A levels to [support] the Year 11 and Year 10 students on intervention.'

(Assistant Headteacher, South East)

To address obstacles in fulfilling Progress 8 requirements, but remaining in alignment with the subject specialisms of existing teachers, schools reported changing their curriculum offers to reflect the skills of their current workforce. For example, an interviewee was 'cutting back on dance and health and social care' because 'I know both of those teachers have English so some proper retraining for them would be a great idea'.

'[We would like to see] a program for teachers to retrain to the core subjects...as I suspect many schools will be dropping some of their vocational courses in light of Progress 8.' (Head of English, South East)

5.3 Complexity of calculations

Interviewees reported a lack of confidence with using the Progress 8 measure to help set targets for pupils. Interviewees suggested that their schools were trying to predict their Progress 8 score and the progress of individual learners, which was proving difficult.

'Everyone is hugely nervous about...what their Progress 8 score will be – we have no idea, we can't predict with confidence what a child is doing and if they will achieve their Progress 8 targets.' (Principal, North West)

'We predicted a Progress 8 figure and when the scores were released it was significantly different to ours.' (Headteacher, Greater London)

The new grading system was causing some concern in this area: '[It is] enormously difficult to predict what the pupils are going to get' particularly with the introduction of new

specifications simultaneously. Others felt that not knowing which qualifications were approved for the 2019 performance measure created ‘delays’ in planning at school level.

This complexity had also made it difficult for some to support staff and parents in understanding the change.

‘The school have had to invest significant time in being secure that they understood Progress 8 and its intricacies, and that they were able to communicate this to parents.’ (Principal, West Midlands)

Where schools reported difficulties in helping staff, parents and governors to understand Progress 8, one reported that people can ‘find it difficult to understand the language used’.

Explaining Progress 8 - DfE’s online video tutorial

In order to assist with explaining Progress 8, two schools had been making use of DfE’s online video tutorial and showing this as part of training/information sessions. They had heard about the video via the DfE’s Twitter feed and felt that the video was helpful because ‘[Progress 8] is nicely and simply broken down’ in it.¹

(Assistant Headteacher, South East)

In one school it was felt necessary to instigate a plan of broader cultural change over the longer term, ‘looking at attainment to progress...with students, with parents and departments’. That in turn, they thought, would lead to increased intervention for specific groups of learners.

Knowledge exchange with other teaching professionals was reported to be helpful, to ‘find out what other people are experiencing at the same time to get some collective thinking’ on how to address any changes in practice required (Headteacher, South East).

‘We are working with our Learning Community in which there are fifteen secondary schools. We meet on a regular basis as heads and as a data group who are working together on Progress 8 and sharing ideas. The idea of talking and sharing is an area of good practice – in these meetings we are not competitive schools, we are all learning together.’ (Headteacher, East Midlands)

Sharing practice has also been implemented by others internally, through ‘challenging data meetings’, attended by teaching staff across the curriculum.

'That has opened up dialogues between curriculum areas and enforced accountability for [progress] amongst staff.' (Deputy Headteacher, Yorkshire and the Humber)

A Data Manager in Greater London suggested that data management software was very helpful in tracking pupil progress over time – 'we can see which pupil is doing well, which subjects are included'. Similarly, others said that 'close assessment of the data and regular progress assessment identifying significantly underperforming pupils' was an effective strategy for staff working together (Head of Upper School, North West).

One interviewee thought that partnering with other schools could offer a solution for small schools who do not currently offer the appropriate range of qualifications required.

5.4 Need for more guidance

The need for additional clarity for schools from Government was suggested by participants in relation to:

- Guidance on reporting pupil progress to parents – how, when and what
- Explaining Progress 8 to parents, governors
- Providing a clear definition of what a 'good' score is for English/maths – in addition, one interviewee noted that 'pass' grades in the new system need to be communicated very clearly to employers; it was perceived that this would help schools to set accurate progress targets for pupils
- Eligible qualifications – there was some confusion as to whether AS levels were approved for Progress 8 or not
- Discussions with interviewees have also highlighted a need to provide further guidance and support to schools around the Progress 8 calculation, technical aspects relating to contextual variations and the approved combinations of qualifications.

5.5 Challenges to overcoming obstacles/barriers

A small number of schools perceived that the obstacles that they were experiencing as a result of Progress 8 could not be overcome, they did not know how to overcome them, or they had not been able to overcome them so far.

Interviewees offered a variety of reasons for this:

- Other schools starting to fill buckets meant that the average had gone up and some school scores had been 'pushed' down as a result

- The reduction in funding created pressures across the school and had not allowed additional measures/actions to be put into place to address Progress 8; this included teaching staff not attending external CPD opportunities to develop strategies for raising Progress 8 attainment (e.g. attending a maths hub to share good practice)
- Interventions such as one-to-one support for learners not making expected progress were not perceived to be sustainable in the long-term (lack of teaching resources/funding)
- Recruitment drives were thought to be difficult, for example the fees charged by recruitment agencies were not affordable.

6. Concluding Comments

Overall, awareness of the new Progress 8 measure is good across schools, and across both senior and middle leaders, although understanding of specific details of the measure was lower, particularly among middle leaders. This lack of understanding related to the approved subjects/qualifications, floor standard and the specifics of the calculation (e.g. confidence intervals and contextual variations); highlighting a need to provide further guidance and support to schools.

Generally, it was felt that Progress 8 was an improvement in terms of encouraging progress across all school cohorts and ability levels. However, there was less agreement that Progress 8 was creating a broad curriculum. Schools reported reducing their qualifications offer (dropping subjects such as art and drama), and felt that the increase in academic focus was being implemented at the detriment of subjects such as the creative arts and technologies. Furthermore, it was perceived that vocational qualifications needed to have a higher profile across the Progress 8 buckets, to recognise learners for whom these were more appropriate.

There were strong concerns about the impact that outliers were perceived to have on a school's Progress 8 score (particularly for small schools); and a need for greater clarification of contextualisation within Progress 8 calculations, to take account of learners with SEN, areas of high deprivation or those with extenuating circumstances (such as medical issues/bereavement) where taking eight qualifications may not be appropriate or possible.

Curriculum change and enhanced pupil performance monitoring were common strategies employed by schools in response to Progress 8. Schools saw these changes continuing for the near future at least. Schools also reported changing timetable/teaching allocations to focus more on English and maths provision in light of the double weighting in these subjects.

There was a perceived need for more communications/guidance for schools in terms of: details of the calculations; approved subjects/qualifications; and explaining the new measure to staff members, governors, and parents.



Department
for Education

© CooperGibson Research

Reference: DFE-RR690

ISBN: 978-1-78105-775-9

The views expressed in this report are the authors' and do not necessarily reflect those of the Department for Education.

Any enquiries regarding this publication should be sent to us at:

David.Gosling@education.gov.uk or www.education.gov.uk/contactus

This document is available for download at www.gov.uk/government/publications