

Global measures of educational performance

How does the UK's performance in maths, science and reading compare with the rest of the world?

The PISA assessment

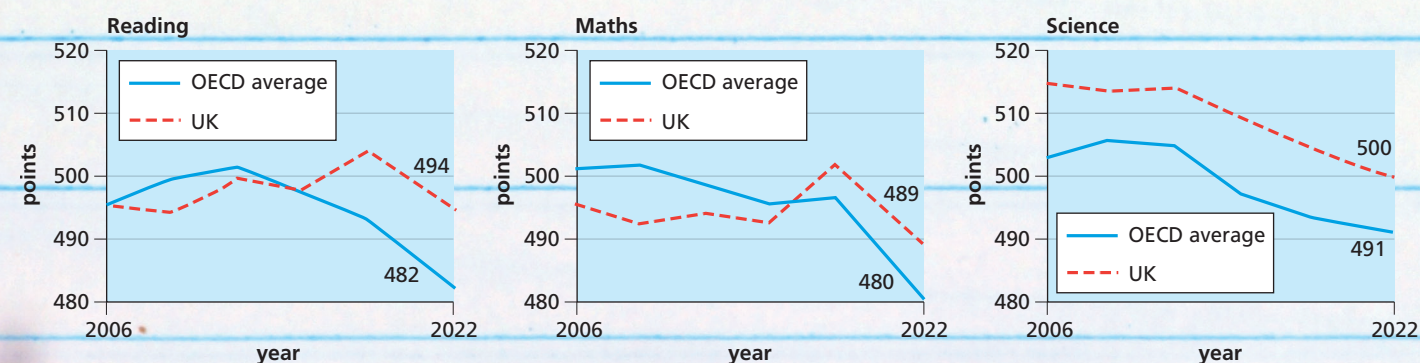
The UK was reported to have suffered a sharp decline in its educational performance in the latest round of measures using international academic tests. The OECD's Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), compares educational attainment among 15-year-olds around the world. The widespread disruption caused by Covid-19 took its toll on UK educational performance.

The OECD data show UK schoolchildren attaining their lowest scores in mathematics and science since 2006. UK reading results were also down (see Figure 1). But other participating countries had even greater falls in attainment. This meant that the UK slightly improved its ranking in the global league tables for maths and reading, despite its own reduced scores.

About 690,000 pupils from 81 countries and economies took part in the 2022 PISA assessment, the results of which were only recently published after a year-long delay owing to the global pandemic. The impact of Covid-19 inevitably shapes these latest sets of results. You might consider some of the problems in making comparisons of this kind when education systems and methods of data collection may differ slightly in different countries. You might also want to consider why the countries in Table 1 routinely finish towards the top in these international comparisons.

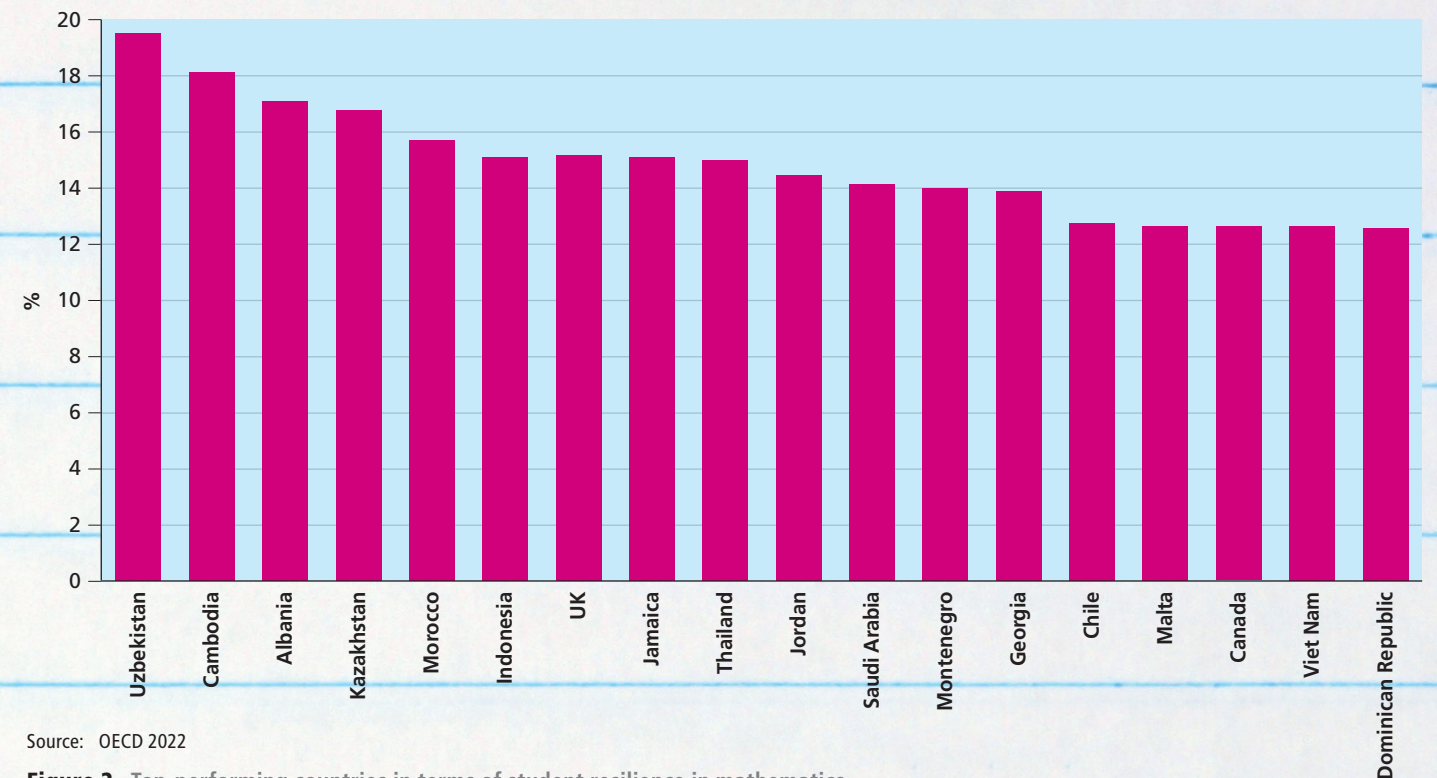
Table 1 Top-performing countries in OECD assessments (2022)

	Mathematics	Reading	Science
	Mean	Mean	Mean
OECD average	472	476	485
Singapore	575	543	561
Japan	536	516	547
Korea	527	515	528
Estonia	510	511	526
Switzerland	508	483	503
Canada	497	507	515
Netherlands	493	459	488
Ireland	492	516	504
Belgium	489	479	491
Denmark	489	489	494
UK	489	494	500
Poland	489	489	499
Austria	487	480	491
Australia	487	498	507
Czechia	487	489	498
Slovenia	485	469	500
Finland	484	490	511
Latvia	483	475	494
Sweden	482	487	494
New Zealand	479	501	504



Source: adapted from *the Guardian*, data OECD 2022

Figure 1 UK scores and OECD average (2006–22)



Source: OECD 2022

Figure 2 Top-performing countries in terms of student resilience in mathematics

Student resilience

The UK does well in terms of student resilience in subjects such as mathematics. Academically resilient students are defined in PISA as those who are in the bottom quarter of the PISA index of economic, social and cultural status (ESCS) in their own country/economy but scored in the top quarter in that country/economy. These students are academically resilient because, despite their socioeconomic disadvantage, they have attained educational excellence in comparison with students in their own country. Figure 2 shows that the UK performs well in this respect.

The impact of Covid-19

The OECD confirms that there has been what they describe as an 'unprecedented' drop in attainment globally, with mean performance in OECD countries down by 11 points in reading and almost 16 points in maths — equivalent to an estimated three-quarters of a year's worth of learning.

Some countries have managed to maintain and even improve their performance despite Covid-19. However, Germany, Iceland, the Netherlands, Norway and Poland had some of the most dramatic declines, with a drop of 25 score points or more in maths between 2018 and 2022. What do you think the wider impact might be of falling scores, if any, for the countries and the students involved?

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