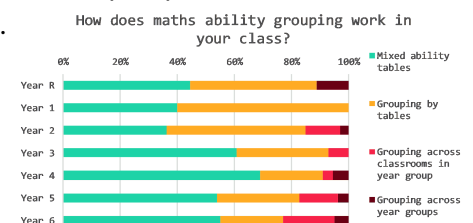


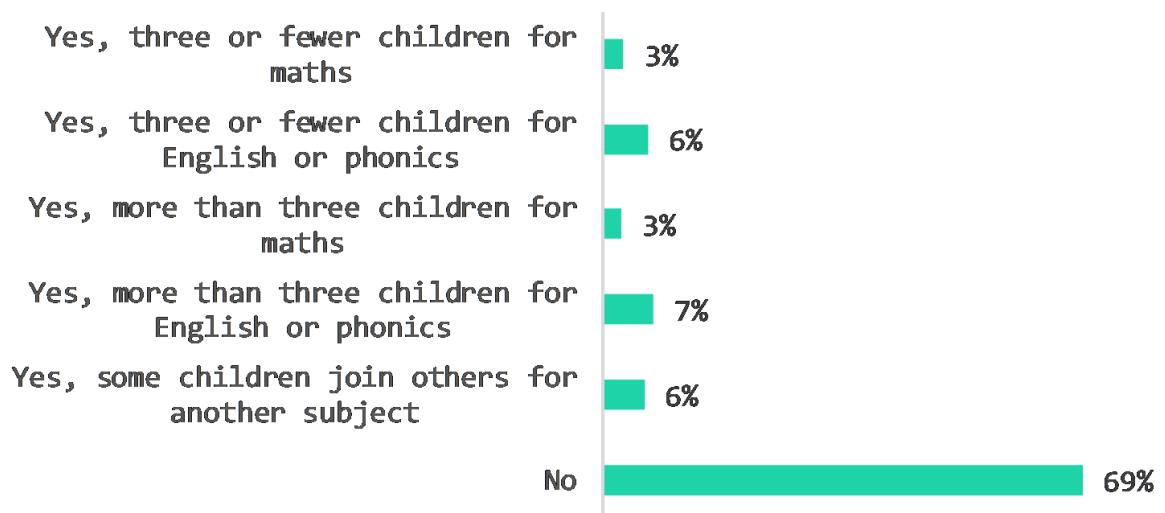
The Strange Teacher Habits of Ability Groupings

One of the things we have been patiently waiting to ask about it is ability groupings. Last year, when the grammar schools policy was touted, a lot of people kicked up a fuss over the segregation of children by ability. (And yes, this includes most of our team members!) But how many schools sit pupils by ability from being very young? We asked specifically about maths and found a divide. At Key Stage 1, around 60% of schools tend to group pupils by ability on their tables (and 40% don't). By Key Stage 2 this changes slightly and around half of teachers have mixed ability groupings, and around half sit them with people who are alike (either on their tables, or by mixing with other classes/years).



We were also interested in the flexibility for children to move across year groups. In general, teachers said their children never move to another year group for any of their teaching (69%). A small percentage of teachers had children move year groups for maths, English, or another subject.

Do any children in your class ever move to another year group?



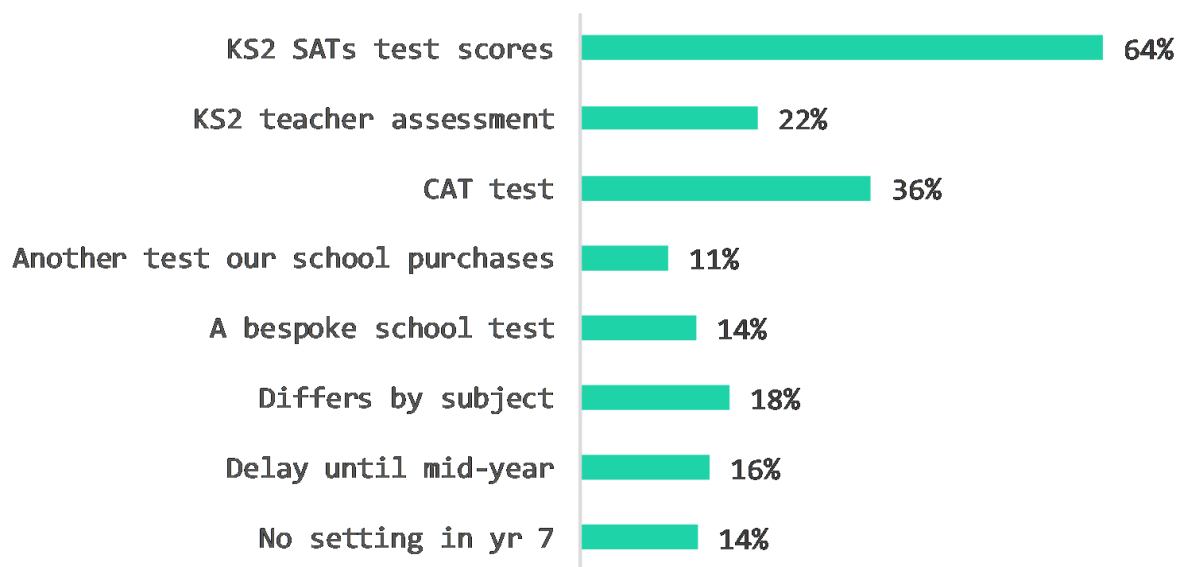
Moving children across year groups is controversial. Recently, a school was criticised for having a set-up in which it grouped children by ability all across the primary school. But we also know there are some serious implications for young children of their birth month. Those born in autumn are often far ahead of those born in the summer, with implications for both. Moving

children across sets can sometimes be a way of dealing with this. But the data suggests it is uncommon.

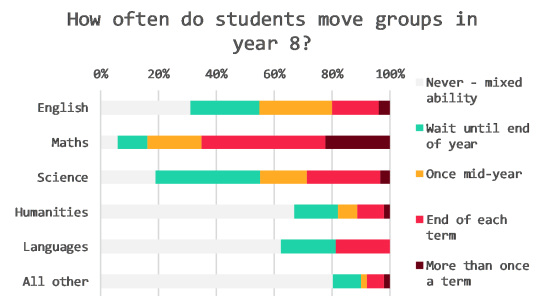
So, what about secondary schools? Do they set & how often do they use primary data to help?

A whopping 64% of secondary teachers told us that Key Stage 2 tests scores affect the sets their year 7 students are placed into. A further 22% said key stage 2 teacher assessments are also included. Given the high level of error for individual SATs scores this is a little disconcerting. The exams are pretty good at giving an indication of how schools are doing for their pupils, but at the individual level they are very noisy. It is therefore unsurprising to see a third of teachers (36%) saying their school buys in CAT tests, and around 10 to 15% saying they either buy another test or make their own. Only 14% of teachers said they had no setting in year 7.

How do you set students in year 7?

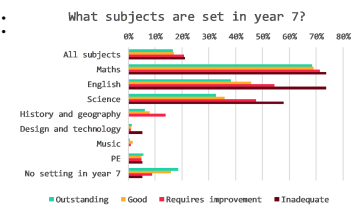


There are differences by subject, however. Interested in knowing how often students were able to move between classes, we asked about year 8s this time, and found that over 60% of humanities teachers did not have any setting for their year 8s. In maths, however, over 90% of teachers said their pupils were set, and over 80% said children moved around at least once a the year. And, 20% of maths teachers said children in their subject move ability sets more than once per term. That is a lot of administration to sort out!



But is setting having a positive effect?

There are many ways to look at a positive effect and a lot of variables we would have to control before saying anything definite on causation. For now, however, we decided to look at Ofsted judgements as an indicator and see if there are any differences in the judgments of schools who set a lot versus those who do not. Here's what we found:



Teachers in inadequate schools reported they set by ability at much higher rates than those who taught in outstanding schools.

This holds across almost every subject (PE is a bit strange) and always follows the same path – outstanding set the least, then good set a bit more, then requires improvement a bit more, up to inadequate setting the most. Is this because setting is seen as an improvement strategy in those schools? Could it be that it's because schools with broader ability ranges are more likely to be rated inadequate? There are a number of options. But what it does clearly show is that Ofsted are not giving out any brownie points for setting by ability. ** Enjoyed this post and want to join our Teacher Tapp panel? Sign up via the [iPhone App Store](#) or the [Android App Store](#). You can also check out more at www.teachertapp.com **

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