

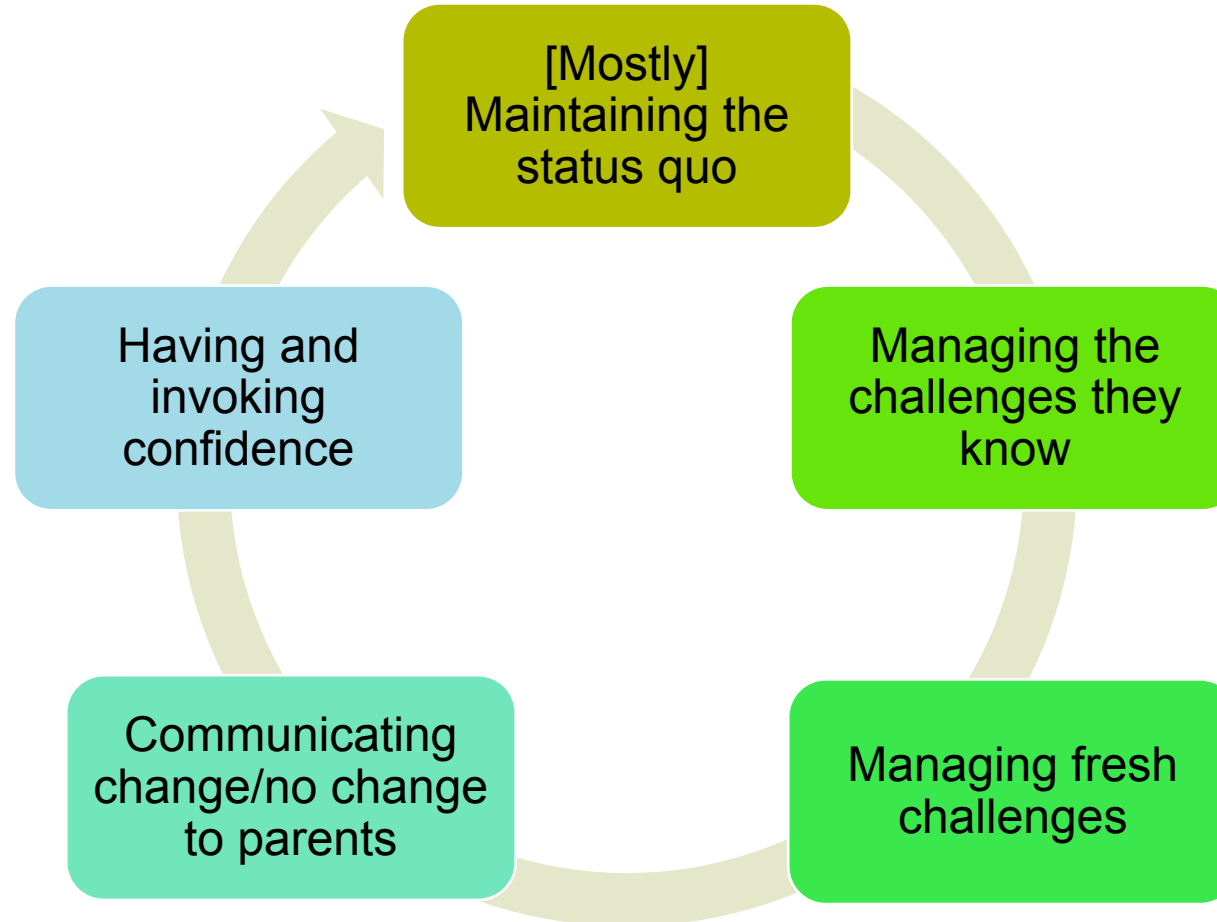
The perennial challenge of assessment

Why assessment matters and what it could mean for learners:
Some reflections on policy, practice and enactment

Professor Mary Richardson

Professor of Educational Assessment (UCL IOE)

Implications for teachers



Resources

Assessment – of all kinds, is common to all teachers... but where is the education necessary to be a ‘good assessor’?

Teacher education/training programmes have a minimal focus on assessment knowledge and practice.

Assessment CPD programmes are many (and varied in quality) but do teachers have time or the support to engage in them?

Good assessment practice is based on a foundation of theoretical and technical knowledge – a reflective cycle of education is necessary to embed and continuously engage such knowledge.

Training and personal development

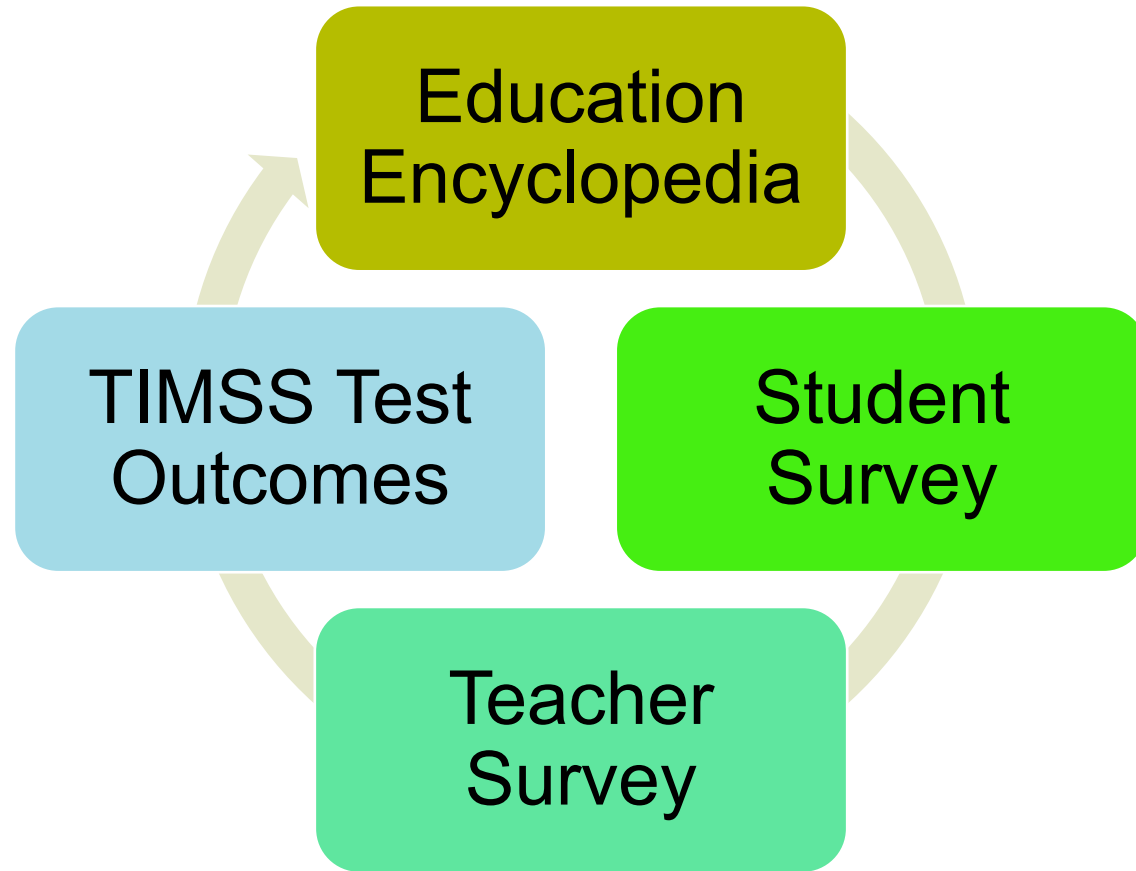
PRIMARY – retention of teacher assessed writing: a challenge of confidence in the system?

Increased emphasis on external moderation – keeps the focus on fairness but at what cost to public confidence in teachers as assessors?

SECONDARY - complex and confusing approaches to assessment of learning: the outcomes still privilege qualifications achieved through high-stakes testing such as examinations. Test preparation prioritized over assessment literacy.

Echoes of post-war tripartite education systems – in the reframing of post-16 qualifications

What do TIMSS data tell us?

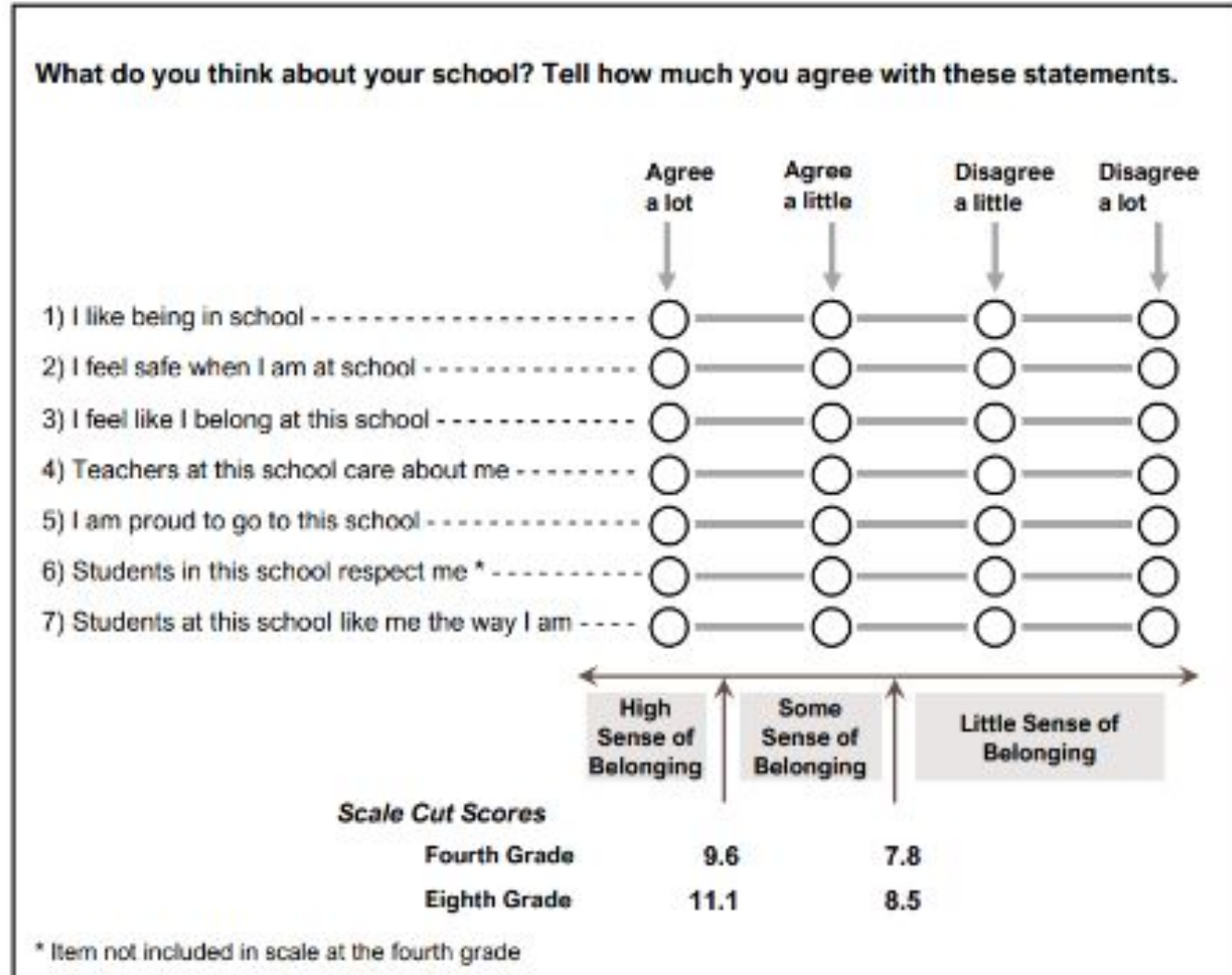


Grade 4: 9-10 years old
Grade 8: 13-14 years old

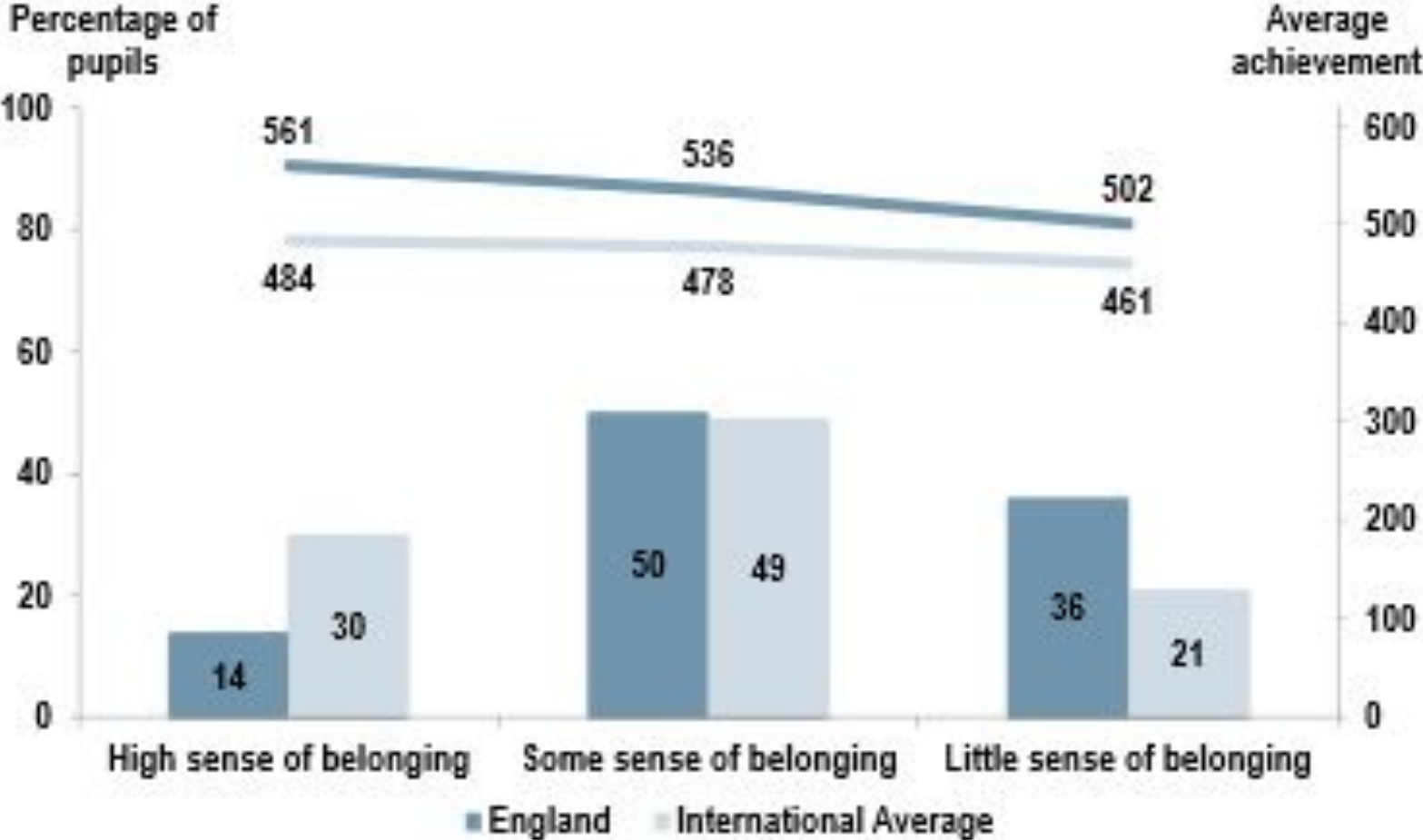


TIMSS International Website

Belonging



England: To what extent did pupils agree they felt a sense of school belonging? (Year 9)



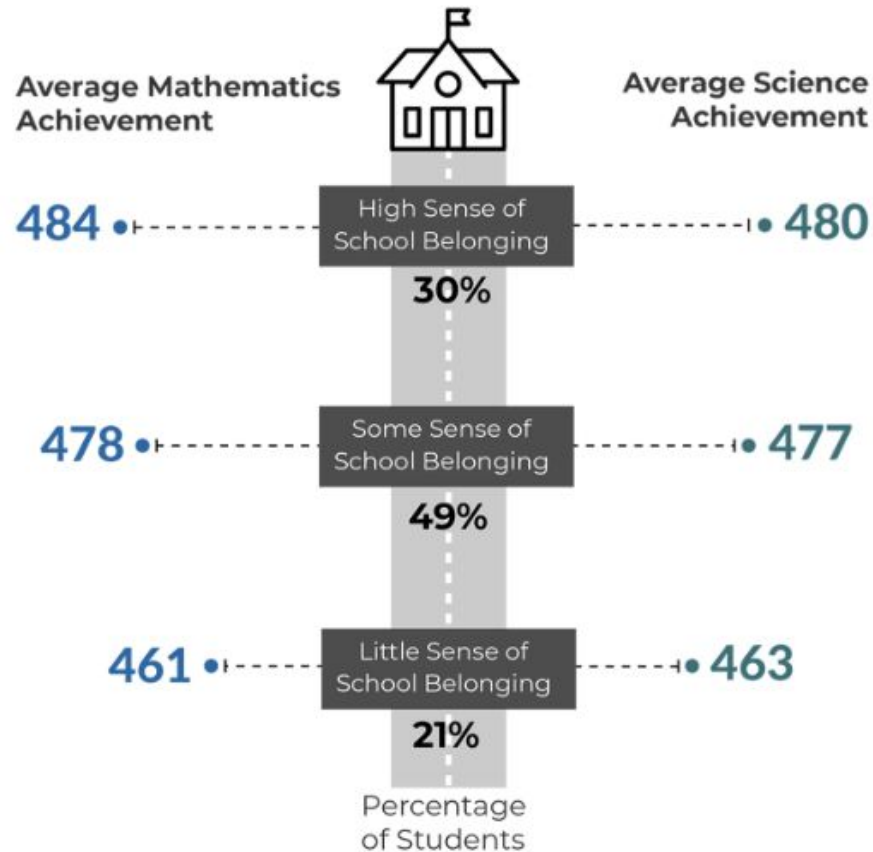
Student Belonging (G8) – all participating countries



Students' Sense of School Belonging



Eighth-grade students who have a “high” sense of school belonging have higher average achievement in mathematics and science than students with “little” sense of school belonging.



Science: Student Absence – all participating countries

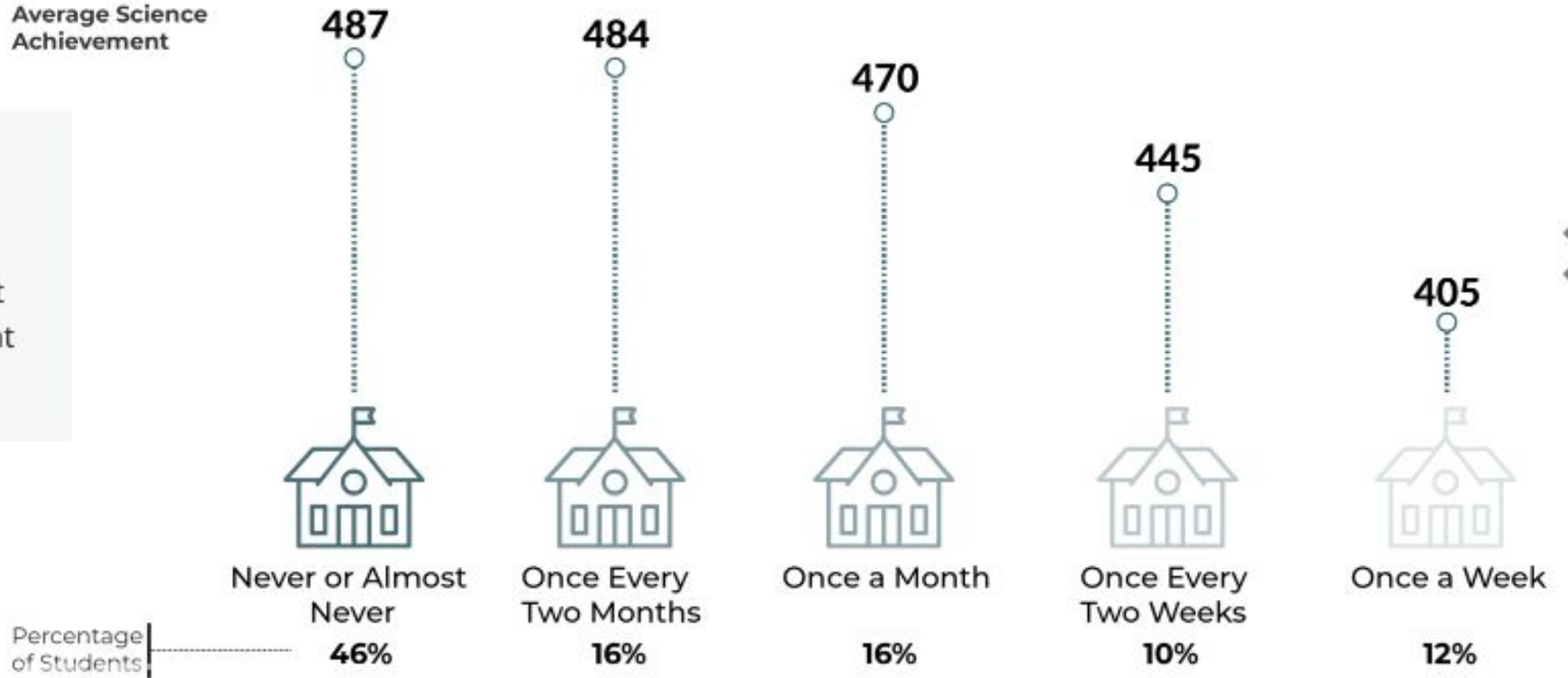


Frequency of Student Absences

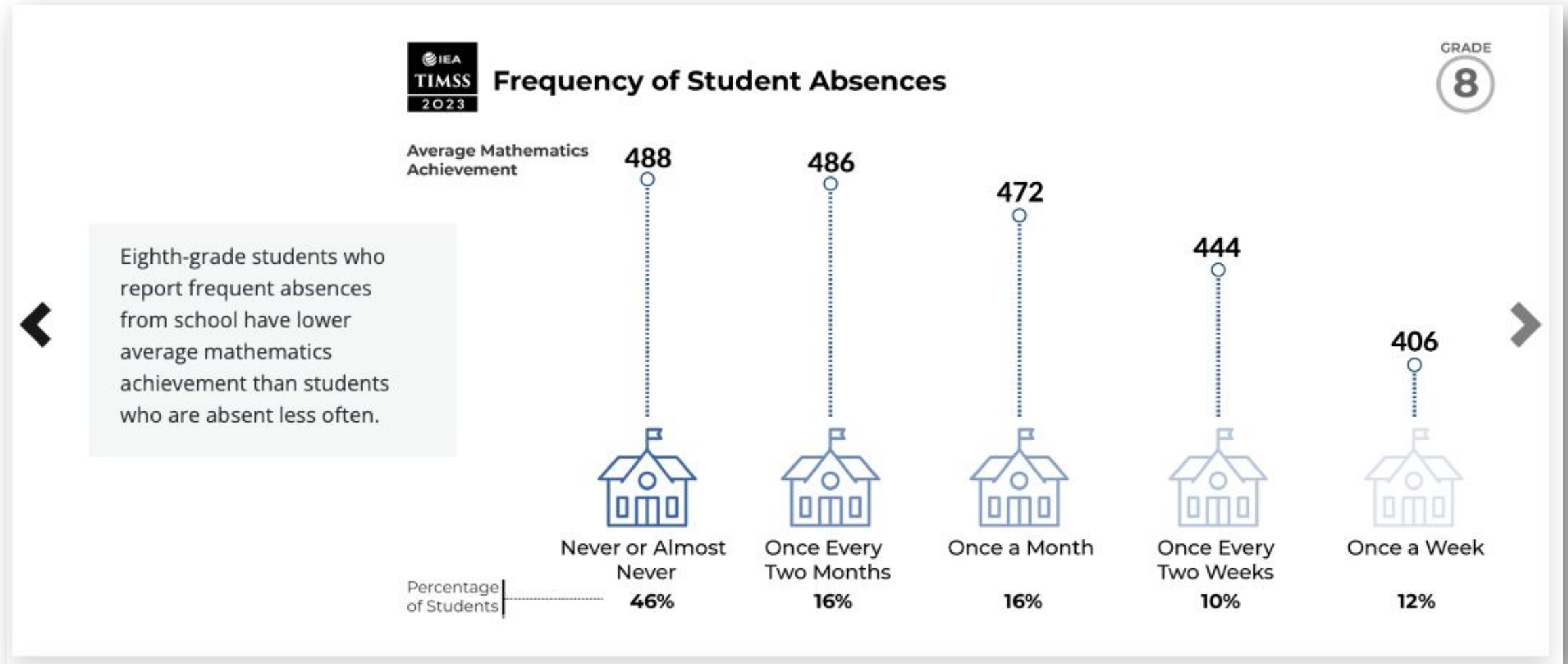
GRADE
8

Average Science Achievement

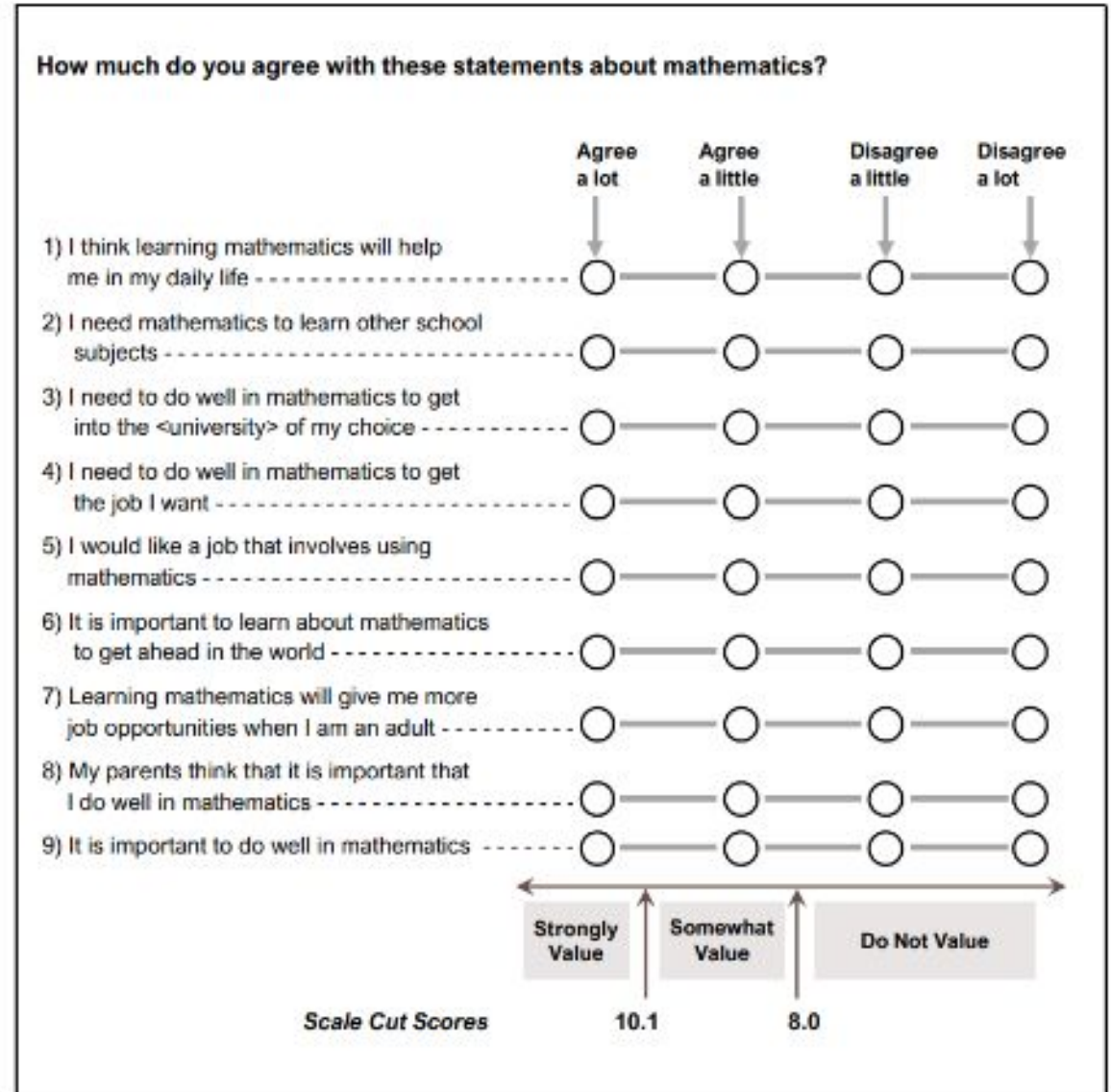
Eighth-grade students who report frequent absences from school have lower average science achievement than students who are absent less often.



Mathematics: Student Absence – all participating countries

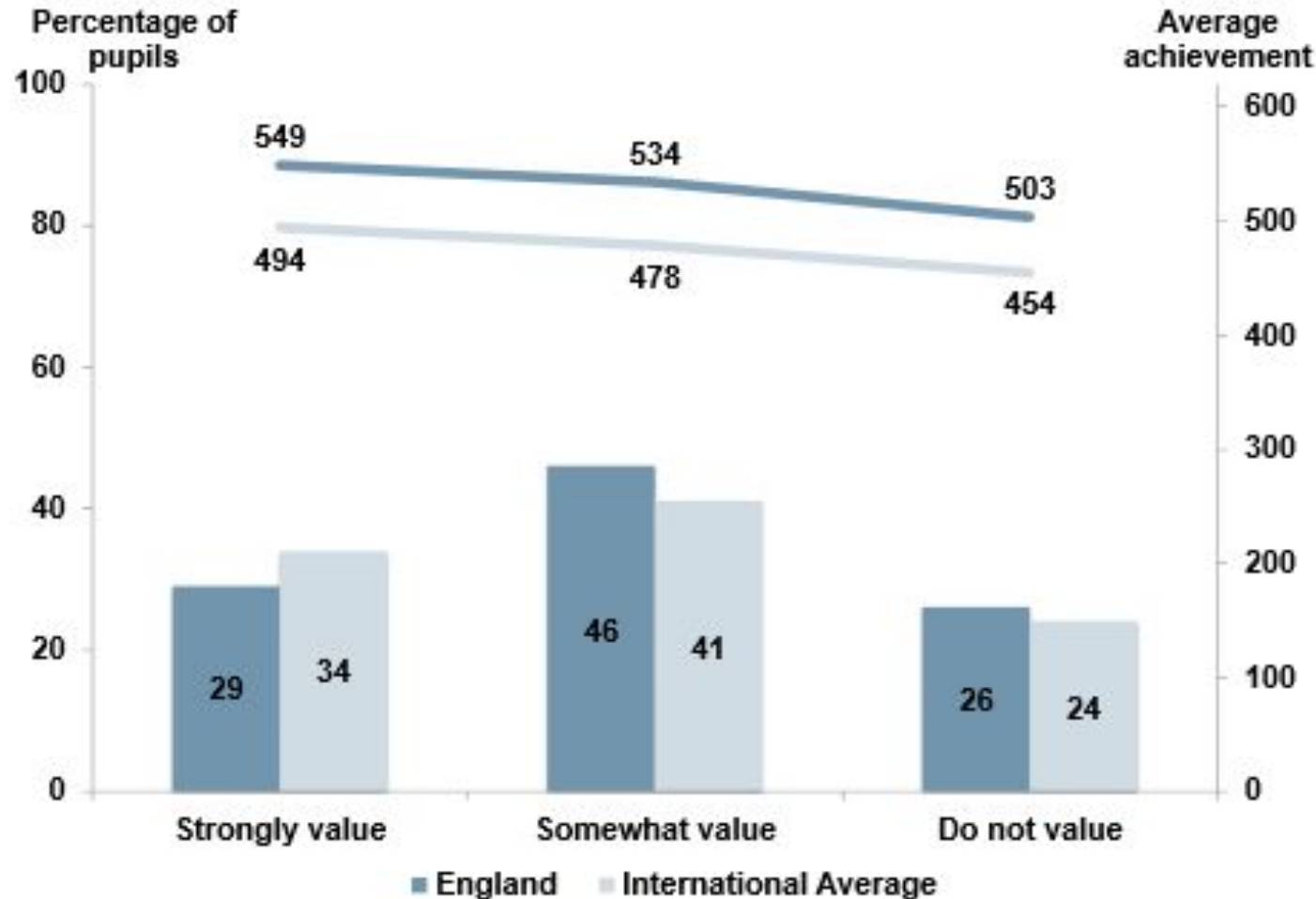


Sense of value (in education and the self)



NB – questions were the same for mathematics and science

The percentage of year 9 pupils reporting the extent to which they value mathematics and their average score (England and international average)



GENDER SPLIT

Strongly value
B: 33% - G: 24%

Do not value
G: 31% - B:20%

What are we to conclude from this?

- The broad evidence indicates patterns of attainment are associated with attendance and/or how students feel about belonging in education.
- ILSAs, such as TIMSS – can indicate that change is necessary and the global trends in absence and belonging and their associations with attainment are important.
- Policy changes are underway globally in education – evidence is required to underpin these to ensure validity of decision making. Are such decisions the right kind and scale of change: will they meet the future needs of students and society?
- Assessment practices – with widespread focus on high stakes testing - could be a significant part of the issue; moving educational success beyond exam results is key and is a focus for future research.

Changes to qualifications

- E.g. Reduction in GCSE structure - to provide more time for other enrichment
- End of Ebacc
- Introduction of V levels – have T levels had time to be ‘tested’
- Is testing talk really the way forward? Assessment conceptualized as an artefact related to employment.

Moral panic related to assessment

Universities need to 'redefine cheating' in age of AI

Widespread use of new tools has 'blurred lines' between academic support and misconduct, study finds

Published on June 27, 2025

Last updated June 27, 2025

Juliette Rowsell

Twitter: @JulietteRowsell

Artificial intelligence has "blurred the line" between what constitutes academic support and what should be seen as misconduct, necessitating a rethink on what is considered cheating, according to a new study.

A fifth (22 per cent) of students surveyed for the paper, "How vulnerable are UK universities to cheating with new GenAI tools?" admitted using AI to cheat in their



Source: Alamy/iStock montage

Pupils using AI to cheat in A-level and GCSE exams

By Matt Davis

The number of students caught cheating in their GCSEs and A-levels soared last year, as many tried using AI to get top marks.

Exams watchdog Ofqual is so concerned about the rise it has set up a scheme to tackle and monitor artificial intelligence-based cheating.

It found one case last year of a pupil accessing the software during their GCSE religious studies exam, but the cheating was exposed by the American spelling of key words in the answer.

Other cases of AI use for coursework were picked up when contractors and teachers became suspicious that some essays seem too good to have been written by a student.

Smuggling

Last year there were 3,525 cases of malpractice in exams, a 7% rise on the figure of 3,140 in 2023 and 27% higher than in 2022.

The most common form of cheating is students smuggling illegal items like mobile phones into the exam room. Previous reforms were supposed to ensure students could copy material off internet sites, but sophisticated AI software now means essays can get tailored to coursework created.

Programs that are free to use like ChatGPT can take just seconds to create an essay that can then be edited and refined by the user.

Christopher McDermott, chairman of the Campaign for Real Education,



Cheats...many bring phones to exams

said: "The attitude for AI cheating is to ban smart phones and digital devices from the examination hall and rely on pen and paper.

"In my opinion, a good process might be allowed. We also need to improve investigations.

"In addition, a student found to be cheating should have all their exams cancelled for that year. All too many coursework assignments for assessment purposes. It will have to be scrapped in most instances."

An Ofqual spokesman said: "The misuse of AI in coursework by GCSE and A-level students is a concern. Students must submit their own work and there are serious sanctions for those caught breaking the rules.

"Ofqual requires exam boards to assess AI risks, prevent cheating and share information about cases with other organisations.

"We continue to monitor the risks and opportunities for AI."

OPINION
My losing battle against AI cheating

HIGHER EDUCATION

Everyone Is Cheating Their Way Through College ChatGPT has unraveled the entire academic project.

There's a Good Chance Your Kid Uses AI to Cheat

More students are hiding their secret weapon from parents and teachers, racking up top grades while AI chatbots do the work

AI Cheating Is Getting Worse
Colleges still don't have a plan.

Science
A.I. Has Learned How to Cheat—and Punishing It Will Only Mak

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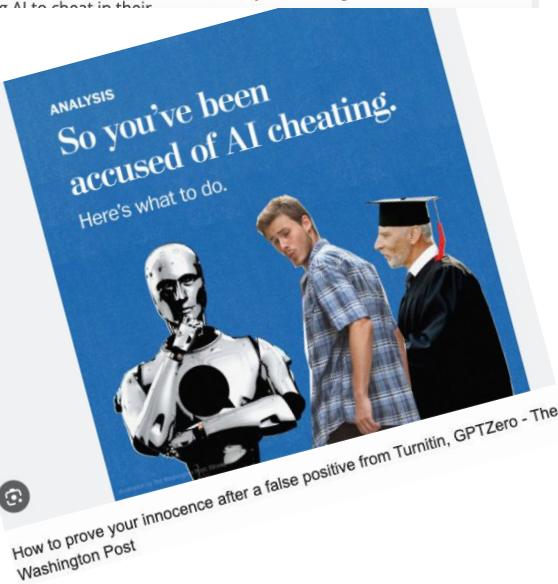
News / Education Today / Featurephila / Why US professors are...

Why US professors are going back to handwritten tests, blue books and oral exams

Professors at US colleges are reviving handwritten exams and oral checks to block AI-assisted cheating, prompting a quick rethink of assessment so tests measure thinking, not polished machine output.

Live TV

Share



Several years before we had all heard of Generative AI models such as ChatGPT, it was suggested by Cope et al (2021:5) that *“Assessment is perhaps the most significant area of opportunity offered by artificial intelligence for transformative change in education”*.

- AI marking of student work
- AI assessment practice – e.g. a model listening to a language test taker and awarding them a grade
- AI teaching

<https://www.theguardian.com/education/2025/nov/20/university-of-staffordshire-course-taught-in-large-part-by-ai-artificial-intelligence>

- AI mentoring tools

Fear of AI

It is well known that in education at all phases the pace of change in relation to pedagogy and assessment can be glacially slow (Richardson & Clesham, 2021).

Despite a plethora of approaches available to assess learning, it is those traditional 'artefacts' of evidence that remain popular – largely, written assignments or examinations which fall at the end of a course of study.

A review of university assessment strategies and regulations in England alone now reveals policies relating specifically to the use (or not) of GenAI in assessment. This replicates the fear in schools of what is real.

What do teachers need?

- A national campaign that communicates their value – we are in a challenging time for all public facing roles
- Commitment to funding for CPD beyond short courses – providing funding to help teachers develop deep, professional expertise
- Confidence in their role as assessors and adequate support/protection in their work
- Improved public understanding about assessment – its possibilities and limits

Effectiveness in reforms

- Uptake in non-A level qualifications
- Improved public understanding of assessment practice and its consequences
- Teacher confidence = student confidence
- GCSE 10% reduction – revealed in improved outcomes?
- Understanding of the use of LLMs and their impact on learning and assessment
- AI Literacy
- Assessment Literacy

Reshaping views of assessment

theconversation.com/a-level-debacle-has-shattered-trust-in-educational-assessment-144640



A-level debacle has shattered trust in educational assessment

Published: August 18, 2020 5:20pm BST

Students protest against A-level results, August 16 2020. I. Salci/Shutterstock

After five days of uncertainty and anxiety, Education Secretary Gavin Williamson announced on August 17 that students in England would be awarded their centre assessment grades (CAGs) this summer – that is, the grade their school or college expected they would most likely have attained had they taken their exams – or their moderated grade, whichever was higher.

Author
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Disclosure statement
 Mary Richardson does not work for, consult,

- *discourses of confidence*: engendering confidence in assessment systems both within and beyond formal educational settings
- *discourses for reshaping*: creating evidence-based understanding of assessment to support change in policy and practice.

<https://theconversation.com/a-level-debacle-has-shattered-trust-in-educational-assessment-144640>

There is little else in education that has as much of an impact as assessment outcomes. We need to be able to trust them so we need to create the right types of environment to cultivate trust in what we do.

Thank you



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You can find out more about my work on the UCL Profiles Database

