

# More than half of state school pupils failing to achieve 'strong pass' in English and maths GCSEs

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More than half of pupils are failing to achieve a "strong pass" their English and maths GCSEs, official figures show, three years after exam reforms were introduced.

At state schools in England, 57 per cent of pupils were not able to get a grade 5 or above in the two core subjects, according to provisional data published by the Department for Education (DfE).

A grade 5 is considered a strong pass by the Government and is used to hold schools to account for their performance, while teenagers who score below a grade 4 in maths and English GCSEs have to re-sit the exams.

This summer was the third year that students took the reformed English and maths GCSEs, which were created by former education secretary Michael Gove as part of an attempt to inject rigour into the qualifications and bring the UK in line with top performing countries in the Far East.

The reformed exams, which are marked in numerical grades of nine to one rather than A\* to G, are designed to separate the very highest achievers with the A\* now split between grades 8 and 9.

School leaders warned that youngsters could be left feeling demoralised if they do not achieve a grade five in the key exams and said there are alternatives to "the annual rite of consigning large numbers of young people to a sense of failure".

Geoff Barton, general secretary of the Association of School and College Leaders, said: "The Government has raised the bar another notch by describing a grade five as a 'strong pass'.

"Well over half of young people do not attain this benchmark in GCSE English and maths despite all the effort they have put into their studies.

"It is a measure designed to raise standards but in fact risks leaving students feeling demoralised even though they have done really well. "And it does not make sense in any case because the distribution of grades is roughly similar from one year to the next wherever the bar is set."

The DfE statistics showed that Michaela Community School – which has been dubbed the strictest school in the country – came fifth in England on the Government's progress measure.

The school's GCSE results, which were four times better than the national average, were the first set it has reported since opening five years ago under the free schools programme.

Gavin Williamson, the education secretary, said that "amazing results" have emerged from free schools, adding: "We've seen real innovation, real change, and actually that's delivering better results in some of the most deprived parts of the country."

Speaking at King's College Mathematics School in London, he said it is "absolutely disgusting" that Labour want to close free schools down as he accused them of wanting to "dumb down" education.