



SHERBORNE BOYS

Value Added and League Tables Explained

Shirburnians perform strongly in exams - it's one of the reasons parents choose us and something for which we are well known. However, that is really only half the story because, on the face of it, there's no easy way of telling how hard someone has worked just by looking at the letters themselves. For this we employ the concept of 'Value Added' (VA) which, in these brief paragraphs, I hope to convince you is a far better measure of achievement than the exam results themselves.

Developed by the *Centre for Evaluating and Monitoring* (CEM centre - www.cem.org), VA works by comparing current exam results with the historic performance of students of similar abilities - i.e. how well pupils have achieved in their exam grades *compared to pupils of similar ability*. By generating an individualised ability baseline, CEM are able to look back at data from the last 20 years to see how well pupils with the same baseline did in their A Levels and GCSEs. From this they compile a portfolio of likely outcome, which forms the basis of VA: beat the expected baseline and you add value; miss it and you don't.

This is only really the tip of the iceberg - CEM offer far more nuanced analyses that this including individualised ability profiles, helpful SEND data and other metrics - but I hope I've thrown some faint light onto the processes by which VA is generated. The 'trick' is that it takes into account the ability of pupils and thus is a measure of how well they have done relative to themselves.

Happily, Shirburnians do very well here – a fact that reflects their hard work and the excellent support boys receive from their teachers. In fact, if you calculate the average VA per pupil and compare that to other schools, our 2021 A Level data places us in the top 3.5% of independent schools. Last year it was the top 1% and we regularly finish in the top 10% (e.g. in 2016 and 2017), all of which we are rather proud.

There are no league tables for Value Added, which is a shame as it's a far fairer system than those based on exam figures. Equally, most performance figures (including all those published by the DfE) do not include International exams (IGCSEs and International A Levels), which means that over half our GCSE results are not considered. It's the same story with BTECs and any exams taken early (e.g. our GCSE triple language programme and all those boys who speak more than one language) are also overlooked. Moreover, league tables do not consider the vast range of sporting, social, pastoral and co-curricular successes that form the lifeblood of boarding schools and which are, at least in our eyes, just as important as exam results. Given these limitations, and the intrinsic bias that comes from raw results, Sherborne does not contribute data to published league tables: they are not a useful measure of academic achievement, nor do they include everything a full boarding school has to offer. Therefore, please do not be concerned if you miss us in the league tables - we, along with many other good schools, aren't there. Instead, I'd like to emphasise that we are incredibly proud of what our boys achieve and, for those of you who like data, I'd point out the excellent VA stats included in this piece.

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