

Tracking & Setting

Sociology

The case for grouping by attainment, and what the evidence on effects shows.

The case for

- Teaching pitched to a narrower range
- Faster progress for high attainers
- Support concentrated where needed
- Manageable for the teacher
- Popular with many parents

The evidence against

- Small average effect, unequal by group
- Low sets often get less experienced staff
- Placement tracks class and month of birth
- Self-fulfilling prophecy in low sets
- Movement between sets is rare in practice

THE DIFFERENCE THAT MATTERS

Most reviews find little gain overall with losses concentrated in lower sets, but findings vary by subject and system.

Educational reference. Ability grouping research is mixed and context-dependent; treat single-study claims with caution.